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ANTI-ZIONISM AND ANTISEMITISM: COSMOPOLITAN REFLECTIONS

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to disentangle the difficult relationship between anti-Zionism and antisemitism. On one side, antisemitism appears as a pressing contemporary problem, intimately connected to an intensification of hostility to Israel. Opposing accounts downplay the fact of antisemitism and tend to treat the charge as an instrumental attempt to de-legitimize criticism of Israel. I address the central relationship both conceptually and through a number of empirical case studies which lie in the disputed territory between criticism and demonization. The paper focuses on current debates in the British public sphere and in particular on the campaign to boycott Israeli academia. Sociologically the paper seeks to develop a cosmopolitan framework to confront the methodological nationalism of both Zionism and anti-Zionism. It does not assume that exaggerated hostility to Israel is caused by underlying antisemitism but it explores the possibility that antisemitism may be an effect even of some antiracist forms of anti-Zionism.

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Introduction

The research question¹

Most accounts which understand antisemitism to be a pressing or increasing phenomenon in contemporary Europe rely on the premise that this is connected to a rise in anti-Zionism. Theorists of a ‘new antisemitism’ often understand anti-Zionism to be a new form of appearance of an underlying antisemitism. On the other side, skeptics understand antiracist anti-Zionism to be entirely distinct from antisemitism and they often understand efforts to bring the two phenomena together as a political discourse intended to delegitimize criticism of Israeli policy. The project of this work is to investigate the relationship between antisemitism and anti-Zionism, since understanding this central relationship is an important part of understanding contemporary antisemitism.

The hypothesis that this work takes seriously is the suggestion that, if an anti-Zionist worldview becomes widespread, then one likely outcome is the emergence of openly antisemitic movements. The proposition is not that anti-Zionism is *motivated* by antisemitism; rather that anti-Zionism, which does not start as antisemitism, normalizes hostility to Israel and then to Jews. It is this hostility to Israel and then to Jews, a hostility which gains some of its strength from justified anger with Israeli human rights abuses, that is on the verge of becoming something which many people now find understandable, even respectable. It is moving into the mainstream.

An understanding of the rhetoric and practice of antiracist anti-Zionism as a form of appearance of a timeless antisemitism tends to focus attention on motivation. Frank Furedi makes the same observation:

Bret Stephens of the *Wall Street Journal* is one of those who argue that many critics of Israel are motivated by an anti-Semitic impulse. However, he acknowledges that it is difficult to demonstrate, convincingly, that someone is anti-Semitic. ‘[There] aren’t many anti-Semites today

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who will actually come out with it and say “I hate Jews””, he notes. Therefore, ‘spotting an anti-Semite requires forensic skills, interpretive wits, and moral judgement’ (Furedi 2007)

But even with such skills, wits and judgment, we cannot know what goes on inside the minds of social actors – neither the conscious mind nor the unconscious. All we can do is relate seriously to what people say, not to what we think they might mean or to what we think may be their true underlying motivation. This approach does not seek to denounce anti-Zionists as antisemitic but it does sound a warning. If some people are treating Israel as though it were demonic, if they are singling out the Jewish state for unique hostility and if they are denouncing ‘Zionists’ as Nazis or racists or identifying them with apartheid, then in doing so, they may be playing with the fire of antisemitism. The danger is that antiracist anti-Zionism is creating commonsense discourses which construct antisemitism as thinkable and possible. There are some people who are prepared to experiment openly with antisemitic ways of expressing themselves and are nonetheless accepted as legitimate by some antiracist organizations and individuals (Hirsh 2006j; Hirsh 2007).² At the moment this form of antisemitism is generally played out at the level of discourse and politics, not on the streets. And those who wish for antisemitism to remain unthinkable are often faced with a charge of interfering with freedom of thought. What is more to the point, however, is the struggle over which notions become hegemonic or commonsense and which remain marginal. Because there is a relationship between discourse and violence, there remains a possibility that discursive antisemitism may manifest itself in more concrete political movements and that these may constitute an increased physical threat to ‘Zionists’, especially Jews and Jewish communities, around the world.

Some who theorize the connection between anti-Zionism and antisemitism (e.g. Matas 2005, Foxman 2004), argue that anti-Zionism is *necessarily* antisemitic on the basis that it denies national self-determination to Jews whilst recognizing a right of national self-determination for all other nations. Most writers who investigate the relationship between antisemitism and anti-Zionism, however, understand the relationship in more fluid and complex ways. Some argue there is often a level of ‘enthusiasm’ present in criticism of Israel which is not apparent in criticism of other similarly serious human

² I will argue, for example, that the Jazz musician and activist, Gilad Atzmon, is a case in point.

rights abusing states and that this can only be explained by factors external to the critique. For instance, Abram de Swaan (2004:1), maintains that this over-enthusiasm functions as

...a vent for righteous indignation that brings some relief from the still-burning shame of the memory of the *Shoah*, it employs facile equations reducing the Jewish State to the last bastion of colonialism and thereby conceals the true issues underlying this conflict.

Moishe Postone (2006) understands this ‘singling out’ of Israel to be a result of a particular kind of rupture in anti-hegemonic social movements, a shift from a positive politics of social transformation to a negative politics of resistance.

Antisemitism... can appear to be antihegemonic. This is the reason why a century ago August Bebel, the German Social Democratic leader, characterized it as the socialism of fools. Given its subsequent development, it could also have been called the anti-imperialism of fools. As a fetishized form of oppositional consciousness, it is particularly dangerous because it appears to be antihegemonic, the expression of a movement of the little people against an intangible, global form of domination. It is as a fetishized, profoundly reactionary form of anti-capitalism that I would like to begin discussing the recent surge of modern antisemitism in the Arab World. It is a serious mistake to view this surge of antisemitism only as a response to the United States and Israel. This empiricistic reduction would be akin to explaining Nazi antisemitism simply as a reaction to the Treaty of Versailles. While American and Israeli policies have doubtlessly contributed to the rise of this new wave of antisemitism, the United States and Israel occupy subject positions in the ideology that go far beyond their actual empirical roles. Those positions, I would argue, must also be understood with reference to the massive historical transformations since the early 1970s, to the transition from Fordism to post-Fordism.

The central relationship between anti-Zionism and antisemitism may be thought of either as one of cause (underlying antisemitism motivates a disproportionate response to Israel) or as one of effect (a disproportionate response to Israel leads to antisemitic ways of thinking or to antisemitic exclusions of ‘Zionists’). Postone points to the willingness of antiracist anti-Zionists to pursue political alliances with antisemitic movements and to turn a blind eye to the more open antisemitism of some mainstream Arab and Islamic forms of anti-Zionism.

The outline of the paper

In this Working Paper³ of the Yale Initiative for the Interdisciplinary Study of Antisemitism (YIISA) I am interested in pursuing this more fluid line of thought. What follows will be a qualitative analysis of anti-Zionist discourse which suggests ways we

³ This is a working paper rather than a book or a journal article. It is intended to outline my arguments and to provide an extended and detailed analysis of a large amount of significant and relevant material analysis into the public domain. This will facilitate theoretical discussion and will also allow researchers access to a large amount of relevant material.

might think through the relationship between hostility to Israel and antisemitism and thus help untangle this particular knot. Discourses of anti-Zionism appear in a number of different forms: academic writing, political speeches and essays, campaigning literature, public debates, newspaper columns and reports, letters pages, blogs and websites. It is a disparate and fragmented discourse. Some of the important actors straddle the political and academic spheres and academic study tends also to constitute political intervention. This throws up complex methodological issues.

The scholarly study of contemporary antisemitism is a particularly contested field. First, there is a tendency for the distinction between primary and secondary research material to be blurred. An academic treatise is also, in Foucauldian terms, a ‘monument’ to an episteme and can function as a political intervention (Foucault 1982). It may itself be understood as an example of discursive antisemitism or an example of a spurious charge of antisemitism made to de-legitimize criticism of Israel. Second, the official institutional framework also constitutes part of the terrain on which political struggles are conducted by, amongst others, academics. For example, the Report of the All-Party Parliamentary Inquiry into Antisemitism (2006) was not only a report but also an attempt, in which academic scholars were participants, to institutionalize as official a particular view of antisemitism. The legitimacy of this official framework was angrily rejected by scholars holding opposing views. The European Union *Working Definition of Antisemitism*⁴ is similarly contested by scholars in the field, some of whom have been actively involved in the work of drafting up the definition. The boundaries of the primary material I am addressing are porous and include scholarly, political, institutional and popular texts.

The outline of the Paper as a whole runs as follows. In the First Part, I will build a conceptual framework for thinking through the relationship between hostility to Israel and antisemitism. I do not accept the view of antisemitism as an ahistorical, ever-present phenomenon which throws up different manifestations of fundamentally the same disease in different times and places. At the same time I am cautious about the claim that there is

⁴ European Union EUMC *Working Definition of Antisemitism*,
<http://fra.europa.eu/fra/material/pub/AS/AS-WorkingDefinition-draft.pdf>, downloaded 8 November 2007

something radically new about the ‘new antisemitism’ and I am acutely aware that within the general rubric of anti-Zionism there are different streams and traditions. This text accordingly contextualizes the antiracist anti-Zionist movement alongside other anti-Zionisms and remains cognisant of the possibility that ideas and elements of rhetoric may move across the porous boundaries between different anti-Zionisms (Stalinist, Arab nationalist, Jihadist, neo-Nazi, liberal and antiracist).

I develop a critique of what I see as a tendency in anti-Zionist writings toward ‘explanatory flattening’; that is, to treat ‘Zionism’, at least in all important regards, as a homogenous phenomenon across time and across political divisions; for instance, by treating the Israeli peace movement and the settler movement as manifestations of one singular Zionist project or by squeezing out the usual distinctions of sociological understanding between state and civil society or civilian and soldier. Another tendency in anti-Zionist discourse I address is its reliance on a methodological idealism which postulates an unusually direct relationship between the *ideas* of key Zionists and the actualization of those ideas in material reality. The existence of an allegedly racist state in the 21st century is held to be the result of an allegedly racist concept in the 19th century. The straight line narrated from concept to actuality does not take sufficient account of the material changes which occurred in Jewish life in the middle of the twentieth century and especially the Holocaust.

One of my own concerns is to understand the centrality of the Israel/Palestine conflict in contemporary left-wing and progressive thinking. I do not think that antisemitism provides an adequate explanation. Rather I focus on the shift on the part of a significant section of the radical left from a social programme of working class self-liberation to a ‘campist’ view of the world, in which the central divide is between oppressed and oppressor nations. This view, which was characteristically labelled internationalist, raises anti-imperialism to an absolute principle. Amongst some on the left, anti-imperialism is no longer one value amongst a whole set - democracy, equality, sexual and gender liberation, anti-totalitarianism, for example - but is the central value, prior to and above all others. If Israel is understood to be a key site of the imperialist system, this threatens to put ‘Zionism’ at the heart of all that is bad in the world. I am more inclined

to look to this kind of political explanation rather than to a cultural antisemitism to explain the centrality of Palestine to much left-wing consciousness. The potentiality for a link between anti-Zionism and antisemitism is straightforward. Most people who are referred to by the designation ‘Zionist’ are Jews. Most Jews are in one political sense or another ‘Zionists’. Most forms of antisemitism in history have allowed for ‘exceptional’ Jews. It is not a necessary attribute of antisemitism that it must target every Jew and so there could exist an antisemitism which exempts those Jews who do not identify as ‘Zionist’ from hostility. It is not, then, my contention that anti-Zionism or anti-Israeli over-enthusiasm is motivated by conscious or subconscious antisemitism. It is necessary to avoid the circularity of assuming antisemitism to be the cause of antisemitism.

My own methodological standpoint is cosmopolitan. I am aiming to use and to develop a framework for doing social theory which disrupts a methodologically nationalist tendency to view the division of the world into nations as being rather more fixed than it is. I also understand cosmopolitanism to be a materialist methodology, in the sense that while it does aspire to radical social change, it retains a solid analytical connection to the world as it is. Robert Fine (2007) describes cosmopolitanism as ‘a transformative as well as analytic project.’ I have contended that cosmopolitanism

... is an argument for a way of fighting against totalitarianism that does not replicate that which it is fighting against. Yet it is a normative project that starts with an analysis of actual events and processes, not only with abstract principles or with utopian yearnings. (Hirsh 2005b: 378)

Fine (2007:xi) describes the appeal of cosmopolitanism as having to do with the idea that

human beings can belong anywhere, humanity has shared predicaments and ... we find our community with others in exploring how these predicaments can be faced in common.

Cosmopolitanism is therefore a universalistic methodology but one which seeks to avoid the emptiness of purely abstract, idealistic, or utopian universalisms. Such universalisms may be dangerous as well as empty, since they break human aspiration away from existing human conditions. It opens up a world where anything is thinkable and a world where it is easy to undervalue that which exists in favour of that which is in one’s mind.

To quote Fine again:

Cosmopolitan social theory understands social relations through a universalistic conception of humanity and by means of universalistic analytical tools and methodological procedures. Its simple but by no means trivial claim is that, despite all our differences, humankind is effectively one and must be understood as such. (Fine 2007: xvii)

In the post-war era, Isaac Deutscher, for example, worked towards a cosmopolitan understanding of Israel and its relationships with Arabs and Palestinians. He understood the conflict as one in which there was both right and wrong on both sides of the ethnic or national divide. Israel was, in his view, a life-raft state, built under the severest emergency conditions imaginable by Jews who were pushed out of Europe. Deutscher insists that there could still have been outcomes other than seemingly endless conflict between Israelis and Palestinians. Deutscher's refusal simply to endorse the nationalism of one side or the other, coeval with the establishment of the state of Israel, contrasts with retrospective tendencies at a later time either to support the nationalism of the oppressed against the 'Zionism' of the oppressors or, alternatively, to support Israel against its 'Arab' neighbours.

One of the side effects of relying on a binary opposition between the nationalism of the oppressed and that of the oppressor, a framework which is distinct from the cosmopolitan approach I am seeking to develop, is to construct the Palestinian nation itself as a single homogenous entity in its struggle for liberation. This approach lends itself to the charge of 'orientalism' (Said 1978) in its inclination to downplay Palestinian agency and differences in favour of a unified narrative of unmediated oppression and resistance. The analytical task, as I see it, is to dispute the image of a simple dualism of oppressed and oppressor. My approach is to resolve the Israel-Palestine conflict into two analytically distinct elements: the Palestinian struggle for freedom and the Israeli struggle for survival. My argument is that an adequate analysis needs to recognize the reality and validity of both struggles, even if they become indistinguishable in practice.

In Part II, I move on from a conceptual discussion of the relationship between anti-Zionism and antisemitism to a discussion of how those concepts become actualized in public discourse. Here I present a number of case studies selected to illustrate how hostility to Israel, and antisemitism have become knotted together in recent British debates. Antiracist anti-Zionists acknowledge that there is such a thing as antisemitism

and that it is possible for antisemitism to appear on the left and within the Palestine solidarity movement. However, in any particular case in which the charge of antisemitism is made, when it relates to ‘antiracist’ criticism of Israel, they are prone to argue that, when examined on its merits, it turns out not to be a case of antisemitism at all; or that, when looked at alongside other more serious racist threats, it is insignificant; or that the antisemitism is exaggerated in order to smear critics of Israel.

I shall investigate a number of case studies of ‘criticism of Israel’ which lie within the disputed territory between criticism, demonization and antisemitism. I identify a phenomenon which I call the ‘*Livingstone formulation*’, after Ken Livingstone, the Mayor of London. He said: ‘for far too long the accusation of antisemitism has been used against anyone who is critical of the policies of the Israeli government’ (Livingstone 2006). I have found that this response to a charge of antisemitism is a common one yet it denies the crucial distinction between criticism and demonization and it subsumes both into the virtuous category of ‘criticism’.

One case study concerns the role of the liberal media in the mainstreaming of those forms of anti-Zionism which touch on antisemitism. Through an analysis of *Comment Is Free*, the website of the British liberal newspaper *The Guardian*, I discuss not only the effects of new technology in giving space to a wider range of unmediated opinions (some of which are arguably antisemitic), but also the role of the liberal press in normalizing debate in such a way as to give an entry to antisemitism which it does not give to other forms of racism.

The next section goes on to look at examples of rhetoric, themes and images which resonate with, or repeat themes from, older forms of antisemitism. These antisemitic themes may be split into two groups: blood libel, where Jews are accused of murdering children for their own pleasure or for the requirements of their religious observance; and global conspiracies to control the world, where Jews are accused of causing others to suffer in order that they can themselves benefit. In contemporary forms of anti-Zionist discourse the former is mirrored, for example, in images and discourses that represent ‘Zionists’ as wantonly cruel killers of children. The latter is mirrored in scholarly theses

concerning the capacity of the ‘Israel Lobby’ to pervert US foreign policy from following its own national interest toward following the national interest of Israel. I argue that this thesis has had a major impact beyond the scholarly community and provides a vocabulary in which it is possible to articulate narratives of Jewish conspiracy in a form that does not appear to be antisemitic.

The trajectory of my case studies leads from the denial of particular manifestations of antisemitism if they take the form of criticism of Israel, towards an ever more diminished caution over expressions of antisemitism. In the Third Part, I turn to the campaigns for boycott, divestment and sanctions against Israel with a particular focus on the proposal for an academic boycott. This section is a discussion of how the conceptual and discursive aspects of anti-Zionism combine in a movement for the concrete exclusion of Israelis, and of nobody else, from the cultural and economic life of humanity. There follows an account of what happened to the various campaigns in the UK to boycott Israel, a detailed exploration of the debate over the boycott of Israeli academic institutions, and a discussion of the implications of the boycott campaign for our understanding of contemporary antisemitism. For example, the boycott campaign itself employed a version of the *Livingstone formulation* to protect it against charges of antisemitism. It wanted to treat the exclusion of Israelis as though it was simply ‘criticism of Israel’: ‘criticism of Israel cannot be construed as anti-Semitic,’ declared a Motion advanced by the campaign and passed by the 2007 UCU Congress. However, the boycott was not proposed for academics who work in other states held to be responsible for human rights abuses; it was only proposed against academics who work in Israel. Such a policy would impact in a number of direct and indirect ways, on Jews more than anybody else. I argue that the boycott campaign further encouraged an exaggerated hostility to Israel and licensed antisemitic ways of thinking. The material gathered in this Paper shows concretely how this took place.

Methodological approaches to the study of antisemitism

One of the unusual aspects of the scholarly study of contemporary antisemitism is that the object of study includes ourselves. Everybody in these heated debates thinks that

everybody else is guilty of making *ad hominem* arguments. Some scholars may expect this paper to fail to relate critically to what they say, but instead to accuse them of being antisemitic and thus to explain what they say. This paper makes every effort to relate to what people who are hostile to Israel *say* and *do*. It makes no claims about what they *are* or about how they are motivated. In *Homage to Catalonia* George Orwell has this to say on the *ad hominem* argument:

... so long as no argument is produced except a scream of ‘Trotsky-Fascist!’ the discussion cannot even begin... In such circumstances there can be no argument... What purpose is served by saying that men like Maxton are in Fascist pay? Only the purpose of making serious discussion impossible. It is as though in the middle of a chess tournament one competitor should suddenly begin screaming that the other is guilty of arson or bigamy. The point that is really at issue remains untouched. Libel settles nothing. (Orwell 2003)

Sometimes people prefix their statements with the phrase ‘as a Jew’. This is also an *ad hominem* argument. They are inviting us to agree with them on the basis of their ethnic identity, not on the basis of evidence or argument. Jews too can make antisemitic claims, use antisemitic images, support antisemitic exclusions and play an important, if unwitting, part in preparing the ground for the future emergence of an antisemitic movement.

It is often claimed that people who warn of the danger of antisemitism are dishonest, particularly when the alleged antisemitism has a form which resembles criticism of Israel. It is said that those who seem to be concerned about antisemitism are really motivated by a wish to protect Israel from criticism of its human rights abuses and so they ‘cry antisemitism’ or ‘play the antisemitism card’ in order to make such criticism appear to be illegitimate. This form of attack is also *ad hominem*. It refuses to take seriously what those concerned about antisemitism say. Instead it tells us what the cynic believes that the anti-antisemites *really* mean. The charge is that really they are concerned with defending the racist treatment of Palestinians and not with challenging the anti-Jewish racism which they themselves, it turns out, have either invented or provoked or, strangely, both. The campaign to boycott Israeli academia constitutes, in itself, one big *ad hominem* attack against Israeli scholars, who are to be excluded from the academic community not for what they write but for who they are (Pike 2007).

Nowhere in this paper is the claim made that all criticism of Israel is antisemitic; indeed contrary to received wisdom, it is exceedingly unusual for any serious person to make such a claim. I do not think that this paper leaves itself open to the *ad hominem* attack that it treats all criticism of Israel as though it were antisemitic, even while it denies doing so. However, if we accept that it is possible for a text to take the *form* of criticism of Israel but also to be antisemitic *in content*, then we need to work through the distinction between criticism and demonization. We need to be aware of the possibility of demonization so that it can be avoided and so that criticism can be critical, strong, sharp and effective. Any literary or social critic knows that there is a distinction between demonization and criticism and that public debate over where and how the boundary is drawn, is legitimate and important.

This paper is not centrally about Israel or Palestine; it is a paper about contemporary antisemitism, contemporary hostility to Israel, and the relationship between the two. Antisemitism is not necessarily the worst thing in the world, it is not the original sin, apart from all other sins. Today, people who say antisemitic things are likely to have stumbled into antisemitic ways of thinking. They are unlikely to be wicked people. If I find that the demonization of Israel is common in the anti-Zionist literature and in the anti-Zionist movement, my intention is not to reverse the logic of demonization in order to demonize the demonizers. It is, rather, to work within a cosmopolitan framework which tries hard to avoid replicating that which it critiques. In this paper I pick up a few stones and find some traces of an antisemitic culture (or worse) underneath some of them. It does not follow that I see antisemitism under *every* stone.⁵

Antisemitism is not a timeless fact of human civilization. It exists within, not outside of, history and society. It is not a single monster across time and across the globe. Nor are manifestations of hostility to Jews isolated from other forms of racism and exclusion.

⁵ I am aware that the objects of this study are global phenomena which manifest themselves differently in different places. While my own primary empirical focus is on the UK, it is necessary to avoid both British parochialism and abstract universalism in order to disentangle the global from the spatially and culturally particular. It is possible to come to conclusions both about the nature of global trends and about what may be specifically British factors which shape their local manifestations. However, this goes beyond the scope of this paper.

The struggles against Islamophobia, antisemitism and anti-Arab racism, the struggle against the occupation of the West Bank and the struggle against the project to smash the state of Israel – these are all potentially democratic struggles and although they are distinct, they can be understood in a cosmopolitan way as belonging to the same family.

In this work *antisemitism* is written without a hyphen because there is no ‘semitism’ which antisemitism is against. Antisemitism constructs ‘the Jews’ or ‘the Zionists’ who are to be hated or excluded. In this paper antisemitism is taken to mean racism against Jews; it is not taken to mean racism against ‘Semites’ or people who speak Semitic languages, or against anybody else. The term ‘new antisemitism’ is not my favourite since there is no single authentic ‘old’ or classic antisemitism from which contemporary antisemitism is distinct. In the British Library there is a book from 1921 entitled *The New Antisemitism* (1921) which debunks the Protocols of the Elders of Zion. This paper does, however, work with the hypothesis that a significant element of contemporary antisemitism is related to exaggerated hostility to Israel. I am not saying that anti-Zionism is a *form* of antisemitism; but rather that there is a complex relationship between the two. This paper does not rely on a definitional identity of one with the other. It bases its case on an investigation of social reality, not on the meanings of words. Muslim, Islamist and Jihadi antisemitism are important and relevant phenomena but they are not the focus of this paper. They are relevant here only insomuch as they impact upon mainstream, left and liberal antisemitism in the UK.

This paper presents and analyzes a snapshot of contemporary events. It is not a historical study which traces the trajectory of anti-Zionist and antisemitic movements. While many of the case studies relate to ephemeral material, it is my contention that enduring threats are manifested through this ever changing form of appearance. Much of the text is forgotten the day after it appears on the internet, but it is constantly regenerated with new articulations of opposition to ‘Zionist’ power, dishonesty and bloodlust.

There are a number of strange and particular difficulties which present themselves to the scholar studying antisemitism or to the activist opposing antisemitism. There is the repeated belittling, half-explicit, half-internalized allegation that one is being a touchy,

paranoid, over-sensitive Jew; or that one will be thought of as such. There is the fear that lifting up the stones to see what is underneath, prodding, investigating, labelling and opposing, encourages the growth of the nascent antisemitism that one finds. We may be advised to let sleeping dogs lie and not to make a fuss; others suffer more than Jews do; Jews are not poor, not excluded, are not an underclass. Simply to write about antisemitism requires that we confront this quietism.

In developing this critique of the relation between anti-Zionism and antisemitism, my own approach is influenced by and draws upon the cosmopolitan and anti-totalitarian frameworks built by political activists and social theorists such as Hal Draper, Hannah Arendt, Isaac Deutscher, George Orwell and Robert Fine. All are radicals who refuse to accept the existing world as given, but whose analysis is firmly rooted within it and anchored to it; all are partisans of cosmopolitan projects which aim to find better, not worse, organising principles than nationalism; all try to come to terms with the awful realities of radical projects whose solutions towered above the problems they were supposed to address in horror, cruelty and the negation of humanity; they are all people who understand that we have much more to lose than our chains, but who still aim to break chains. All are human, not gurus or Gods; they change over time, they change their minds, they make mistakes, they get things wrong, they work things through.

Hannah Arendt struggled with the contradictions of Zionism and of fighting antisemitism ‘as a Jew’; she rejected the intuitively attractive understanding of antisemitism as an ahistorical given. She was denounced as a traitor by conservative Jews and as a cold-warrior by conservative leftists. She devoted her intellect and energy to understanding how European civilization, and its emancipatory project, had thrown up the horrors, first of imperialism and then of totalitarianism. But she never stopped trying to understand; understanding, like friendship, was itself a crime against totalitarianism and punished severely. She thought the trial of the Nazi Adolf Eichmann in Jerusalem was a missed opportunity for the project of cosmopolitan law, but she insisted that Israel had every right to put him on trial. Robert Fine has struggled with the complexity of holding on both to the critique of the world as it exists and to the critique of the critique. If you drop the critique then you make your peace with endemic injustice; drop the critique of the

critique and you recklessly, in spite of the repeated warnings of history, risk the horrors of totalitarianism. He has taken the Arendtian mission of understanding seriously in his critiques of democracy, apartheid, totalitarianism and antisemitism and in his re-conceptualization of Marx's political philosophy and cosmopolitanism.

George Orwell stood for a left which valued internationalism, equality, respect, antiracism, anti-imperialism, anti-totalitarianism, democracy and secularism, yet he understood the danger of raising one of these values to an absolute at the expense of the all the others. He learned to shoot at Eton but went to shoot fascists in Spain; he learned to hate imperialism as a policeman in India, he fought against imperialism, but he also understood that some things were worse than British rule in India. Isaac Deutscher opposed Zionism when it was a political project, loved the state of Israel when it was founded, didn't even consider the possibility of an anti-Zionism after the Holocaust, but never identified himself as a Zionist. If he was soft on Stalinism, he was not soft on Stalinist anti-Zionism. Hal Draper's interpretation of Marx was necessary to make explicit Marx's implacable opposition both to antisemitism and to totalitarianism. Draper's Marxism gave us a vision of the socialist movement as a democratic project; a project of self-liberation, a collectivity of free individuals; the exact opposite to what was generally accepted as Marxism in Hal Draper's time. Draper offered a socialist framework for understanding the Israel/Palestine conflict. He was not necessarily right, as it turned out, but he was a socialist. Many 'socialist' analyses of the conflict which are offered today are very far away from any conception of socialism with which he would have identified. Let me end with an example of how he addressed the issue in May 1948:

To recognise the right of the Jews to self-determination, if it is not merely to be a pious obeisance to a formula, requires socialists also to recognize the right of the Jews to defend their choice of separate national existence against any and all reactionary attempts to deprive them of that right, whether by Arab feudal lords or UN imperialism. That is why we demanded recognition of Israel by the government, and why our British comrades particularly must demand similar action by the Labour government — as the concretisation of the demand that the imperialists keep out. That is why we demand the lifting of the imperialist embargo on arms to the new Jewish state... The reunification of Palestine and of the two peoples in it can take place only through a struggle from below. The conditions for such a struggle are present as they were before partition — the class struggle within Jewish society, and the grinding exploitation of the Arab peasants by their lords and masters... While opposing any attempt by the Arab landlord regimes to overthrow the Jewish state and impose their reactionary sway on the whole land, it is the duty of real socialists in Israel to fight for a policy, programme and a government of the working people which can bring about such reunification instead of deepening the nationalist gulf. (Draper 1948)

PART I ANTISEMITISM AND CRITICISM OF ISRAEL: CONCEPTUAL CONSIDERATIONS

(i) The many headed hydra: an ahistorical model

There is a commonsense intuitive view which interprets different manifestations of anti-Judaism as being forms of appearance of an ever present underlying antisemitism. This view understands antisemitism as though it was like a many headed sea monster. It is always lurking under the surface of the water and it puts up different heads in different places and times. Antisemitism in this view is an ever-present fact of human history; the difference between a time or a place where it is visible and one where it is not is purely contingent. When one head of the monster is cut off it simply grows another but it never dies.

Medieval Christian antisemitism was one such form of appearance of the underlying monster, one menacing head which became visible above the surface. This antisemitism demonized Jews as Christ-killers. It charged them with deicide and with regularly and ceremonially re-performing the crucifixion of Christ on innocent non-Jewish children (Julius 2006).

An early left wing form of antisemitism saw Jews as evil capitalists or as greedy money lenders. Some people who considered themselves to be on the left felt that campaigns against Jewish capital and Jewish bankers were legitimate and useful ways to introduce the masses to campaigns against capital and bankers in general.

Right wing antisemitism has often portrayed Jews as embodying the Bolshevik threat. Jews corrupt the normal workings of society and nation by fighting for ideas such as socialism, human rights, equality, democracy, which work to undermine the cohesion and the natural functioning of social life.

Racist pseudo-scientific antisemitism emerged, which understood Jews as a biological infection to the social body. This head of the monster had no difficulty in holding that

the Jewish infection worked both through Jewish capitalism *and* through Jewish Bolshevism. Both were means by which ‘the Jews’ polluted the human community.

Now, argue a number of theorists, we are seeing a ‘new antisemitism’ (Chesler 2003; Iganski and Kosmin 2003; Foxman 2004; Matas 2005; Phillips 2006; Rosenfeld 2006). Often, but by no means always, ‘new antisemitism’ is understood as a new form of appearance of the same old monster. Previous antisemitisms stressed the cosmopolitan nature of Jews. They stressed the abnormality of a people with secret international communal loyalties which threatened the ‘normal’ kinds of open loyalty which people have to their community, their nation or their class. But when Jews build a nation-state and ‘normalize’ their national allegiance, there arises a ‘new antisemitism’ which enables a shift of the embodiment of evil from the Jewish individual to the Jewish state. It is now the state that is accused of standing in the way of world peace, of being responsible for stirring up wars, of being uniquely racist or apartheid or dangerous in some other way. Anti-Zionism has a tendency to present the crimes and failings of the Jewish state as the whole and necessary truth of the Jewish state. This, it is argued by many ‘new antisemitism’ theorists, is analogous to the way that antisemitism presented the crimes and failings of particular Jews, the Bolshevism of Trotsky, the greed of the landlord Rachman, the capitalist exploitation of the Rothschilds, as the whole and necessary truth of all Jews in general.

One strength of this view, that these are all forms of appearance of the same underlying phenomenon, is that it is intuitively attractive. It has often felt to Jews that each new attack was nothing but a mere repetition of the old ‘cancer’, or a current mutation of the familiar ‘virus’; it was only ever in temporary remission.

Another strength of this view is that it can account for the fact that many of the themes and images of demonization are common to the different forms of antisemitism and are also frequently mirrored in contemporary anti-Zionist discourse.

One problem with the ‘Hydra’ explanation is that while each form of anti-Judaism does draw on and replicate older forms, they are also hugely different phenomena. They arise and they become widespread in radically different times and places. They have different

manifestations, are employed by different social forces, they make use of different narratives. The differences are actually as striking as the commonalities, between the Spanish Inquisition, Christian antisemitism in nineteenth century Poland, socialist antisemitism in Germany at the time of August Bebel, right wing antisemitic anti-Bolshevism, racist antisemitism, Nazi genocidal antisemitism, understated and gentlemanly English exclusion, contemporary anti-imperialist anti-Zionism and Jihadi antisemitism.

The second problem for an ahistorical essentialist view of antisemitism is that there have been times and places where life has been, in general, good for Jews, where Jews have been able to function well as part of the wider community, where they have not been excluded from public life, education or the professions; where they have had freedom to worship and where other racisms have been more dangerous, immediate and threatening.

Contemporary Europe is in many ways one of those good times and places for Jews. Although the frequency of antisemitic attacks has been rising sharply in the last decade,⁶ you are still more likely to be beaten up on the street, excluded from society, excluded from the economy, excluded from education or demonized in the media, if you are black or Muslim, for example, than if you are Jewish.

The many headed sea-monster theory could lead us to react to current threats as though they were identical to previous threats. Some Jews mistakenly thought they could appease Nazism, deal with it, come to an accommodation with it, as they had, to an extent, been able to do with previous threats. But the Nazi threat was different. Now, some campaigners⁷ feel that they are facing an imminent genocidal onslaught of the kind that was faced in the 1940s. But perhaps the current threat is not just a new manifestation of the previous one, but is in fact a different set of phenomena, in a different society at a different time, for different reasons.

⁶ Antisemitic Incidents Reports 2005, Community Security Trust, London, <http://www.thecst.org.uk/index.cfm?content=7&menu=7>, downloaded 21 December 2006; Antisemitic Incidents Reports 2006, Community Security Trust, London, <http://www.thecst.org.uk/docs/Incidents%5FReport%5F06.pdf>, downloaded 15 February 2007.

⁷ For example, Phyllis Chesler (2006): ‘Just as Hitler was appeased until it was too late, so too has Ahmadinejad been appeased’.

Another problem with an essentialist and ahistorical theory of antisemitism is that, as Hannah Arendt argued, it undermines human agency and responsibility for antisemitism. It constructs antisemitism as an ever present structure which dominates human subjectivity:

In view of the final catastrophe... the thesis of eternal antisemitism has become more dangerous than ever. Today it would absolve Jew-haters of crimes greater than anybody had ever believed possible. (Arendt 1975:8)

Antisemitism understood as a timeless fact of human history is also likely to be thought of as undefeatable. This insight would have significance for the strategy adopted to respond to the ‘new antisemitism’, and in particular would shed light on who should be thought of as a racist enemy and who, on the other hand, who should be thought of as being susceptible to argument, education and persuasion.

(ii) The tropes of anti-Zionism

I am using the term ‘anti-Zionist’ to denote a variegated set of movements which do not coalesce around criticism of Israeli policy or criticism of racist movements within Israel but rather around a common orientation to the existence or to the legitimacy of the state of Israel itself.

I have not argued that antiracist anti-Zionism and anti-Israeli over-enthusiasm are motivated by antisemitism. I have looked for more complex explanations of the outcomes of anti-Zionist thinking and I have maintained that to do this it is necessary to examine the central tropes of antiracist anti-Zionist discourse. It is by beginning to make sense of these discourses, what they claim, by what kind of methodologies they are produced, in what kind of political traditions they stand, that it is possible to unravel some of the elements of the central relationship between these discourses and antisemitic ways of thinking which may be immanent within them. It may be asked why one should focus on the anti-Zionism when most contemporary critics of Israel are not existential anti-Zionists. Yet criticism of Israel, of this or that thing that Israel does, is not the focus of this work. The focus of this work is antisemitism. So it is a hypothesis, at this stage, that anti-Zionist discourse is important in shaping, not criticism of Israeli policy, but those whose hostility to Israel constitutes something more threatening than criticism, something indeed, which cannot be properly understood as criticism.

Hostility to the idea and practice of Israel comes from various sources – among which are liberal nationalism, Marxist anti-imperialism, democratic cosmopolitanism – and it is not the same as hostility to Jews. I am asking whether it can nevertheless throw up a politics and a set of practices which creates a commonsense notion of Israel as a unique evil in the world and which thereby sets itself up for a fight with Jews; those Jews, anyway, who do not define themselves as anti-Zionist. The antiracist variants of anti-Zionism constitute minority discourses and minority movements within the global set of anti-Zionist discourses and movements. They are conditioned by their location within this set of different discourses and movements, through the circulation of common elements of rhetoric, of commonsense assumptions, and through explicit or tacit political alliances.⁸

Contemporary left wing secular antiracist anti-Zionism cannot be understood solely as an intellectual or political critique of ‘Zionism’ but also needs to be understood as a broad and variegated movement which exists alongside a set of other anti-Zionist movements. Methodologically, therefore, it is necessary to look at the theory, the discourse and the claims of anti-Zionists, but it is also necessary to take into account the social reality of the ways in which these are actualized in the world. The movement is the site where the relationship between a set of shared conceptual meanings and understandings on the one hand, and the real-world political and social actualization of those understandings and meanings, on the other, are played out.

This contemporary movement is distinct from late nineteenth and early twentieth century anti-Zionist movements. These were predominately Jewish movements which proposed responses to antisemitism other than Zionism, such as Bundism or revolutionary socialism.⁹ Contemporary anti-Zionism often sees itself in these anti-Zionist traditions but actually exists in a radically different world, made different by the history of the twentieth century. It is largely the way that contemporary anti-Zionism relates to this

⁸ An example of an alliance between antiracist anti-Zionism and Islamist anti-Zionism is the Respect party in the UK (now apparently splitting apart). An example of the kinds of compromises that are tempting is the adoption of the slogan ‘We are all Hezbollah now!’ by many in the summer of 2006 (Hirsh 2006b). Hezbollah is open about its own antisemitism.

⁹ Miller (2007) focuses on the commonalities between non-Jewish anti-Zionism in Britain before 1948 and today; he foregrounds the similarities, ‘in particular the common arguments that both current and past British anti-Zionists have used to demonize and de-legitimize Zionism’. My argument here, in contrast, focuses on the differences between opposition to a political movement and opposition to a nation state.

different world that defines it as a movement. Opposition to Israel's existence tends to constitute a battle of ideas against an idea. Its first focus is on 'Zionism' as an ideology and its relationship to real-world phenomena is often conditioned by its explanatory emphasis on ideology.

Post-1948 anti-Zionism is not a single movement but a collection of differing currents. There is a current of Middle Eastern anti-Zionism which was hostile to Jewish immigration into Palestine, to a Jewish presence there and to the foundation and the continued existence of the state of Israel. In the Middle East there are both secular and Islamic anti-Zionist traditions. In the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc there was a tradition of Stalinist anti-Zionism. Right wing and neo-Nazi antisemitism is increasingly articulating its hostility to Jews in the form of anti-Zionist rhetoric (for example David Irving; David Duke (2004; 2004a). There is also a contemporary current of anti-Zionism which toys openly with antisemitic rhetoric that is hard to place in terms of the left/right scale but has connections with both (for example, Gilad Atzmon,¹⁰ Paul Eisen, Israel Shamir).

In order to approach a clear analysis of this contemporary anti-Zionism, it is necessary to do more than look at the arguments and the narratives that anti-Zionist theorists produce. It is also necessary to look at how they are realized in the practices of political movements and campaigns. In this arena ideas do not exist in isolation; they are part of a movement. And the anti-Zionist movement has unclear, porous and shifting boundaries. The debate exists at the intersection of a number of different and mutually hostile terrains; the left discourses of 'anti-imperialism' and post-colonial theory; the totalitarian discourses inspired by Nazism, Jihadi-fundamentalism and Stalinist communism, the nationalist discourses of Arab and Palestinian anti-colonialism, the Christian and Muslim religious discourses of antisemitism and Jewish communalist minority anti-Zionist movements. Concepts and commonsense notions developed within one kind of discourse tend to slip and slide, and metamorphose, into those of the other terrains.

¹⁰ See Part II for a fuller discussion of Atzmon

I am interested in the emergent properties of these ideas, discourses and narratives when they are actualized in these living movements; when elements of rhetoric which are not formally antisemitic gain a life of their own; when they escape the control and supervision of the antiracists who formulate them and who put them to work in political campaigns. The political work here is to win mainstream left and liberal milieus over to the internalization of various claims about Israel and ‘Zionism’ as commonsense and heartfelt truths.

If some elements of the broad anti-Zionist movement are self-consciously antisemitic, that is, racist against Jews, it is necessary to analyze the ways that those who think of themselves as antiracist relate ideologically to these other traditions and to look at how concepts function in the movements which take them up, how they migrate and develop in their exposure to the public sphere, and how that actuality relates back to the development of narrative and theory. I am not only interested in the truth or coherence of the ideas of anti-Zionism but also in the properties which emerge, sometimes unforeseen or unintended, through their use and propagation.

For example, anti-Zionist discourse often challenges the claim that Zionism is a form of nationalism. Nationalism is usually understood to contain racist potentialities as well as elements which define a community of common responsibility. But Zionism is often understood to be essentially different from all other nationalisms – as nothing at all but a mode of exclusion. It is necessary to investigate the empirical truth of this claim as well as the coherence of the argument. But this will only uncover half of the story. The other half is to be understood by looking at the ways that the Zionism=Racism claim is actualized in the movement and in the world beyond. How does the anti-Zionist movement actually relate to ‘Zionists’, who are defined as racists? How does it license or encourage others to relate to ‘Zionists’? How does it, in practice, define the group, ‘Zionists’, who are to be treated as racists and how do others define the term?

This is partly a question of how anti-Zionist theorists and activists understand their own political responsibilities. Michael Neumann, a philosophy professor at Trent University in Canada, is an extreme example of one who refuses to take political responsibility for

the consequences of his anti-Zionism. He outlines his approach to the question in an e-mail exchange with an antisemitic group (Jewish Tribal Review 2002). They ask him whether he thinks that their website is antisemitic. He replies

Um, yes, I do, but I don't get bent out of shape about it. I know you're site and it's brilliantly done. Maybe I should say that I'm not quite sure whether you guys are antisemitic in the 'bad' sense or not.... [I]n this world, your material, and to a lesser extent mine, is a gift to neo-Nazis and racists of all sorts. Unlike most people in my political niche, this doesn't alarm me: there are far more serious problems to worry about.... [O]f course you are not the least bit responsible for how others use your site.¹¹

This discussion occurred five months after Neumann (2002) had published a piece entitled 'What is Antisemitism?' in which he argued that antisemitism is trivial compared to other racisms and that it is understandable that Israeli crimes result in a hatred of Jews in general. Here are some quotes from this piece by Neumann which illustrate a willful and showy refusal by somebody who considers himself to be an antiracist, to take antisemitism seriously:

Undoubtedly there is genuine antisemitism in the Arab world: the distribution of the Protocols of the Elders of Zion, the myths about stealing the blood of gentle babies. This is utterly inexcusable. So was your failure to answer Aunt Bee's last letter.... The progress of Arab antisemitism fits nicely with the progress of Jewish encroachment and Jewish atrocities. This is not to excuse genuine antisemitism; it is to trivialize it. ... If Arab antisemitism persists after a peace agreement, we can all get together and cluck about it. But it still won't do Jews much actual harm. ... Israel has committed war crimes. It has implicated Jews generally in these crimes, and Jews generally have hastened to implicate themselves. This has provoked hatred against Jews. Why not? Some of this hatred is racist, some isn't, but who cares? Why should we pay any attention to this issue at all? (Neumann 2002)

The anti-Zionist movement has a tendency to flatten analytically important distinctions. For example, many believe the distinction between state and civil society in Israel to be entirely absent, indeed, some take this insight to such lengths that they do not define Israel as a state at all.¹² The idea of a unity of 'the people' with 'state' sets up a frame for doing criticism that tends to dissolve politically relevant distinctions. Anti-Zionism tends to fuse civil society with the state. It erodes the distinction between the people in their plurality and state policy. It erases the complexities of Israeli society and history. It is

¹¹ This email exchange is published by 'Jewish Tribal Review' against the wishes of Michael Neumann. I asked Neumann whether this exchange was a forgery: 'The material is not a forgery but I do not vouch for its reliability because I no longer have the original correspondence' (e-mail 5 July 2005).

¹² See for example *Image 5*, a map of Lebanon on the Respect website entitled 'Map of Israeli Terror'. The countries around Lebanon are named: Syria and 'Occupied Palestine'.

often also tempted to dissolve the distinction between civilian and soldier. ‘Zionism’ is typically presented in anti-Zionist discourse as a one-dimensional unity. There is a rejection of a methodology that is interested in development over time or in understanding the phenomenon in context or of understanding the complex and contradictory dynamics that are usually thought to characterize the development of a movement or state.

Distinctions between left and right, bigots and antiracists, one form or tradition of Zionism and another, settlers and non-settlers, occupied territories and Israel, Arab citizens and Arab non-citizens often become fuzzy. The distinction that remains clear, that dominates, is between Zionist and anti-Zionist; the significance of everything else is downplayed.

Anti-Zionists may respond to this charge by saying that it is not the anti-Zionists who blur distinctions but ‘the Zionists’. It is Israel that has no separation between state and civil society; it is Israel that wants to annex the West Bank; it is Israel that subordinates politics to the imperatives of ‘security’, it is Israel that singles itself out in the world. This is an illustration of the way that anti-Zionism tends to replicate in its critique the errors and crimes of ‘Zionism’. ‘Zionism’ in this paper is often in inverted commas because it is not actual Zionism or the actual practices of Israel that the anti-Zionists replicate, but rather it is their own construction of ‘Zionism’, which bears little resemblance to the material reality of the state of Israel or Israeli society. Their ‘Zionism’ is a totalitarian movement which is equivalent to racism, Nazism, or apartheid. Anti-Zionism tends to itself against a notion of ‘Zionism’ that is largely constructed by its own discourses and narratives. The ‘Zionism’ that anti-Zionist discourses typically depict and denounce is more like a totalizing and timeless essence of evil than a historical set of changing and variegated beliefs and practices. It is presented as an unthinkable object which requires either unconditional rejection or belief, rather than as a social and political phenomenon. The term ‘Zionism’ is often used in such a way as to bring it closer to the language of evil than to the province of social scientific or historical understanding. ‘Zionist’ often hits out like an insult and carries such pejorative connotations that the reality behind it has ended up disappearing under layers of stigmatisation. For example: ‘The

Zionists think that they are victims of Hitler, but they act like Hitler and behave worse than Genghis Khan' (President Ahmadinejad quoted in Jerusalem Post 2006); 'Zionism is a form of racism...', UN General Assembly Resolution 3379 (later rescinded); 'Zionists and their friends are desperate to silence the voices of and for Palestine', (from an op-ed piece in the Guardian newspaper Soueif 2006); '[Respect] is a Zionist-free party... if there was any Zionism in the Respect Party they would be hunted down and kicked out. We have no time for Zionists', (Yvonne Ridley, February 2006, Imperial College, London, or-Bach 2006).

The demonization of 'Zionism' appears to be part of an anti-oppression politics, but it points in another direction: toward a totalitarian way of thinking whose language is that of conspiracy conducted by dark forces.¹³ A solution is often conceived not in terms of peace and reconciliation but rather in terms of destroying or uprooting the evil, wherever it is to be found.¹⁴

Joseph Massad (2003) begins his analysis with the assertion that Zionism is a colonial movement that is 'constituted in ideology and practice by a religio-racial epistemology', adding that it is 'important also to analyze the racial dimension of Zionism in its current manifestation....' He understands Zionism to be defined by its commitment to 'building a demographically exclusive Jewish state', which he understands alongside the European colonial ideology of white supremacy over colonized people. Already we can see that Massad's notion of Zionism is for practical purposes, homogenous. It is one 'Jewish supremacist' movement, from the 1880s to the present day. There are no significant differences between Zionism in the 19th and in the 21st century; between left and right Zionism, between religious and secular Zionism, between Labour Zionism and the Zionism of the fundamentalist settlers. Massad writes as though there was a single Israeli culture with a single ideology and a single purpose; a homogenous body of Israeli Jews. All differences are flattened out by the dominating principle of 'Jewish supremacism'. This assumption of homogeneity underpins a methodology which takes incidents and

¹³ For example, Sue Blackwell, '...the boycott was defeated following a well-funded campaign by the Zionist lobby' <http://www.sue.be/pal/academic/AUT.html>, downloaded 15 February 2007. More examples are analyzed in Part II of this paper.

¹⁴ For example Hayim Bresheeth on the Oslo peace process: 'The Palestinians are not turkeys, and will not vote for Christmas, and the idea that they can be forced into the 16 ghettos is ludicrous.' (Bresheeth 2004)

quotations from particular people, places and times to stand for and to illustrate the true nature of all Zionists in all places and throughout history.¹⁵

While antiracist anti-Zionism often claims to rest on a ‘historical materialist’ methodological foundation, some of its central assumptions seem to rely more on a methodology which gives primacy to ideas in the shaping of social life than to one which focuses on material factors. Antiracist anti-Zionism has a complex relationship with the Nazi genocide of the Jews, yet it is often more comfortable looking at cultural constructions of the Holocaust than it is thinking about the material effect of the Holocaust itself.

Massad’s methodology starts with ‘Zionist’ *ideology* and this task is much simplified by the assumption that in all its essentials, ‘Zionist’ ideology is one coherent body of thought. This assumption, in turn, is justified by reference to two things in Massad’s work. Firstly, Zionism is understood as part of the European colonial project. This

¹⁵ For example, Massad tells that the leading Russian language daily in Israel published an article in January 2002 called ‘How to force them to leave’ suggesting that the Israeli government should use the threat of castration to encourage Arabs to leave the country (Relying on Galili 2002, which is a newspaper report translated into English from Hebrew of the original newspaper article in Russian). The assumption of Zionist unity means that one opinion piece in one newspaper can be understood to illustrate the nature of Zionism as a whole. The fact that the paper reportedly received no outraged feedback from its readership should not come as a surprise, Massad tells us, since the following month the Tourism Minister Benny Elon proposed that the entire Arab population should be expelled from Israel. Elon, a fundamentalist religious Jewish settler who is defined by his support for what he euphemistically calls ‘transfer’, according to the assumption of Zionist homogeneity, speaks for all ‘Jewish supremacists’, or Zionists. Shimon Peres, Ariel Sharon, Benny Elon, Theodor Herzl, Golda Meir, and the Meretz party are all used in this piece to exemplify ‘Jewish supremacism’. One piece in the Israeli newspaper *Ma’ariv* entitled ‘The Jews who run Clinton’s cabinet’ demonstrates the ‘major ideological convergence between anti-Semites and Jewish supremacists’ (Massad 2003:446).

David Duke, a right wing open antisemite also uses the term ‘Jewish Supremacism’. He uses the term to refer primarily to the world Jewish conspiracy, although his rhetoric takes both anti-Jewish and anti-Zionist forms. Duke (2004), also makes much use of the *Ma’ariv* article in his piece ‘Want to know the truth about Jewish Supremacism in their own words?’ on his website.

The *Ma’ariv* piece is a manifestation of the Zionist project of ‘turning the Jew into the anti-Semite’ (Massad 2003:446), which was, Massad tells us, from the early days of the *Haskala* thinkers and Herzl himself, what Zionism aimed to do. An Israeli newspaper article, an assertion and a quote from Herzl’s diary are employed to outline Zionist thinking on antisemitism. In a footnote, Massad directs us to another of his papers for his analysis of ‘Zionism’s complicity with antisemitism and its use of anti-Semites as a model’. He then adds an incident where an Israeli officer said that there was something to be learnt about military technique from the methods employed by the Nazis to clear the Warsaw ghetto, to an assertion that it is Israeli practice to write numbers on the arms of thousands of Palestinians in detention camps, to reveal something more about the relationship between Zionism, antisemitism and Nazism.

expands the methodology of explanatory flattening globally and across five hundred years. The whole history of ‘white’ imperialism is understood as essentially one racist project. The Crusades, British rule in India, colonization of Australia, New Zealand, the United States, South Africa, the British Mandate in Palestine, US policy during the Cold War in South and Central America and East Asia, the wars against the Saddam regime in Iraq, Belgian rule in Congo: all are essentially the same. Particularity becomes insignificant next to the one explanatory element of European racist exploitation. And Israel is part of this wider project. Actual history, human agency and contingency constitute little but the way that the big project happens to have played itself out in different places and at different times.

The second justification for the assumption that ‘Zionist’ ideology is one coherent body of thought is that the ‘Jewish supremacist’ project is not a racist movement among Jews, in Massad’s understanding, but rather it is presented as something global:

[T]he only way these arguments acquire any purchase is in the context of an international, read western, commitment to Jewish supremacy, wherein Jews are seen as white Europeans defending white European values and civilization against the primitive Arab hordes’ (Massad 2003: 449).

‘Zionists’ and Israel constitute, therefore, for Massad, one central element of the larger Western imperialist project. Some nineteenth century ‘socialists’ constructed Jews as being a central element in the workings of international capitalism. Much contemporary anti-Zionism understands the Jewish state to play a pivotal role in global imperialism.

The second element that justifies the assumption of Zionist homogeneity is definitional. What various ‘Zionists’ have said and written is interpreted as coherent and unified agreement upon an essentially racist project. Zionism is defined by Massad as ‘Jewish supremacism’; it is related to racist movements, to Nazi movements, to colonialist projects and to Apartheid. The essential, necessary and unchangeable character of Israel is defined by etymology. Actuality is found to be a manifestation of this definitional necessity. One key way of defining the difference between anti-Zionism in the sense that we are using it here and criticism of Israeli policy, is the anti-Zionist insistence that Israel is necessarily and unchangeably unique. ‘Zionism’ is Nazism but Israel is not like Germany; ’Zionism’ carries out ethnic cleansing but Israel is not like Croatia or Serbia;

‘Zionism’ settles occupied land but Israel is not like China; ‘Zionism’ is a colonial settler project but Israel is not like Australia. For anti-Zionism Israel is the totalitarian movement, not a nation or a state. Its policy at any particular time is often understood to be a manifestation of its inner essence, derived definitionally.

This framework gives huge explanatory importance to ideas and ideology. The racist idea is held to create and define the necessarily racist state. The story is often told by anti-Zionists. It begins with Herzl and it picks out some racist quotes from his book; it moves on to Jabotinsky and to Ben Gurion, picking quotes and anecdotes, before it arrives in 1948 and the *Nakba*, as the actualization of the racist idea in the world. It goes on to 1967 and shows how the inherently expansionist and colonial character of the ‘Zionist idea’ is manifested by the taking and settling of territory.¹⁶

There is a joke from the 1920s: What is the definition of a Zionist? A Zionist is one Jew who gives money to a second Jew so that a third Jew can go to Palestine.

Contemporary anti-Zionist discourse is comfortable on the terrain of the narrative construction of the Holocaust but it is less comfortable with the Holocaust itself. The Holocaust is understood as the trauma that psychoanalytically pathologises Israel, rendering it uniquely compromised (Rose 2005).¹⁷ The Holocaust is understood as something that is used by the ‘Zionists’ to justify their racist actions and to make some money on the side (Finkelstein 2003); it is understood as an event that, if not authored by the Zionists themselves, was aided by them or in which they were tied by complicity (Brenner 1983; Allen 1987);¹⁸ it is understood as a source of illegitimate Jewish power and Jewish moral authority.

¹⁶ The withdrawal of settlers from Gaza, first held by my anti-Zionists to be impossible, then interpreted only as another manifestation of racist demographic necessity, is now understood as a means of further imprisoning and constricting and isolating the inhabitants of Gaza and facilitating a more barbaric form of occupation. The fault-line in Israeli politics at the time of the withdrawal, between the orange and the blue, was understood only to be illusory; and anyway, an insignificant spat between Jewish supremacists over how best to further the cause of the racist movement.

¹⁷ For a critique of Jacqueline Rose by Shalom Lappin and for her response, See Issues 6 and 7 of *Democratiya*, at <http://www.democratiya.com/>.

¹⁸ For more on Jim Allen’s *Perdition* and on the relationship between the anti-Zionist left and Holocaust denial, see Ezra (2007) and Rich (2007).

Gillian Rose wrote about a tendency in the 1990s to treat the Holocaust as something ineffable. She criticized Habermas' implication that the Holocaust should be thought about as though it was holy, as though it was outside of history:

It is this reference to ‘the ineffable’ that I would dub ‘Holocaust piety’.... ‘The ineffable’ is invoked by a now wide-spread tradition of reflection on the Holocaust: by Adorno, by Holocaust theology, Christian and Jewish, more recently by Lyotard and now by Habermas. According to this view, ‘Auschwitz’ or ‘the Holocaust’ are emblems for the breakdown in divine and/or human history. The uniqueness of this break delegitimises names and narratives as such, and hence all aesthetic or apprehensive representation (Lyotard). (Rose 1996)

Rose was right to warn against Holocaust piety and was also perhaps prescient in understanding that what would follow piety would be its opposite, Holocaust sacrilege. First Holocaust piety was misunderstood and misrepresented as a willful self-interested and dishonest instrumentalism rather than as a healthy seriousness and respect taken too far. Then it became possible for antiracist anti-Zionists to allow themselves the frisson of committing sacrilege – in the cause of Palestine, naturally.¹⁹

The anti-Zionist movement understands itself to be in the tradition of pre-war opposition to the project of Zionism, but it has difficulty relating its tradition to the material, historical, events of the twentieth century. What happened was that the perspectives of the European Jewish anti-Zionists were not only politically defeated by Nazism (not by ‘Zionism’) but most of the anti-Zionists were also killed by Nazis.²⁰ Jewish life and culture over large parts of Europe was removed. Certainly amongst the remnants, the attraction of Zionism, of the idea of Jewish national independence, was strong. But it would surely be incomplete to understand events as the actualization of an unbroken thread of ideas and to neglect the huge material transformation that gave an entirely new context to those ideas.

¹⁹ Simonon (2006) tells the story of the political wrangles which occurred around the commemoration of the Holocaust in Belgium at the site in Mechelen of the deportation of Belgian Jews to Auschwitz: ‘So, in September 2005, the new committee of experts published their conclusions. Their opinion on the museum [at the site of the deportations under Nazi occupation] was that it should be transformed into a more inclusive outlet, a memorial not just to the Holocaust but to all genocides and crimes against humanity. In other words, its Jewish specificity was inappropriate.’

²⁰ This fact, perhaps, sheds light on why many anti-Zionists go to such length to demonstrate the ideological ‘similarity’ of Nazism and Zionism. It is only in this way, that it is possible to paint the Nazi defeat of pre-war anti-Zionism as a victory for ‘The Zionists’.

In the middle of the 20th century Israel was not imagined as a European colony. It is strained, to say the least, to believe that Jews in the refugee camps in Europe and in British Cyprus, recovering from starvation and from existences as non-humans, were thinking of themselves as standard bearers of ‘the European idea’. The seamless insertion of the history of ‘Zionism’ into a schematic history of colonialism casts Jews as going to Palestine in order to get rich on the back of the people who lived there. Jews, who are said to embody some European idea of whiteness, also embodied a European idea of rats and cockroaches which was held to constitute an existential threat to Europe. Massad mentions the effect of the Holocaust in transforming ‘Zionism’ but he does not analyze its significance.²¹ He does not discuss what it was about the Holocaust and the establishment of the state of Israel that changed the terms of the debate so completely. He writes as though the debate remains fundamentally the same in spite of the fact that the social reality of Europe and its relationship with Jews had changed. It is difficult to imagine how it could have changed more radically. He also mentions the fact that Jews did not emigrate to Palestine *en masse* due to an ideological commitment to Zionism but due to their expulsion from European and Middle Eastern countries,²² but he does not grasp the significance of this fact – that ‘Zionism’ was not only a construction of ideology but to a significant extent was the result of material circumstance.

Jews, Massad, rightly points out, did not go to Israel because they were convinced Zionists in the sense of the pre Holocaust debates. They went to Israel because the world had changed, because they had nowhere else to go, because they were homeless and they wanted to find a home. Also, as Massad says, Jews arrived in Israel because they were expelled from a number of countries in the Middle East. Massad is not explicit about

²¹ He says: ‘Jewish anti-Zionists continued to oppose Zionism’s Jewish supremacist plans until 1948 when most of the support they had received over the decades dwindled against the reality of the holocaust and the establishment of the Jewish supremacist state’ (Massad 2003:445).

²² ‘...[I]t is also important to remember that the majority of Jews who reside in Israel today, or at least who emigrated to Israel in the 1930s and ‘40s and ‘50s, did not come to Israel because of Zionist reasons. We have to remember that the larger segment of the Israeli Jewish population came to Israel as refugees after the war, and after 1948, from both Europe and the Arab countries, not because of the success of Zionism, but because they were refugees and had no other place to go.’ (Whitehead 2002:213).

how this huge influx of refugee Jews was incorporated into the white Jewish supremacist colonialist project. But he believes that they were, quickly and completely.²³

Left anti-Zionism is often adopted by people who consider themselves to be influenced by Marxist historical materialism, yet it operates with a methodology that tends to give an overwhelming explanatory importance to *ideas*. This methodology is selective. What it leaves out is as important as what it includes. For example the Holocaust; for example the ethnic cleansing of Jews from the rest of the Middle East in the 50s and 60s; for example the existence of the antiracist Israeli left and peace movement; for example Middle Eastern antisemitism; for example, the influence of Nazism in the Middle East during the 1940s. (Küntzel 2006)

Left anti-Zionism is often adopted by people who consider themselves to be anti-essentialist yet it operates with a methodology that understands events as little more than the manifestations of Israel's racist, colonialist and totalitarian essences.

Left anti-Zionism is often adopted by people who consider themselves to be politically responsible yet it operates in a world where, increasingly, antisemitism clothes itself in the rhetoric of anti-Zionism (EG Duke 2004; 2004a). It fails to see this context as significant and it refuses to take reasonable care in its consciousness of the boundaries between the antisemitic demonization of Israel and the legitimate criticism of particular policies of the Israeli state. It operates as though the only kind of anti-Zionism that is significant is antiracist anti-Zionism. It often fails to take seriously the fact that much of the anti-Zionism around its own political universe is hostile to Jews, viscerally, religiously, implicitly or only *de facto*.

The anti-Stalinist left, particularly those sections which identified as Trotskyist, encountered huge difficulties in general, when faced with a post-war world in which Trotsky's global revolutionary perspective had been entirely defeated. Neither of the two possibilities which Trotsky foresaw had happened; the 'degenerated workers state' of the

²³ 'The Jewish side, and by that I mean both Israeli Jewish society and the Israeli government, are still as Zionist as they have always been, and committed to Jewish supremacy. Jewish supremacy is the basis of the Israeli state. This is exactly the crux of the matter.' (Massad in Whitehead 2002:214)

Soviet Union did not collapse, nor did the workers show signs of making a ‘political revolution’ against the ‘bureaucracy’. In fact, the ‘degenerated workers state’ came out of the war hugely strengthened and it replicated itself across a significant section of the world. Capitalism showed itself again, also against all expectations, to be hugely dynamic, and its ‘death throes’ seemed to go on for a long time. The world seemed to find a third option that was neither socialism nor barbarism. Much of the anti-Stalinist left had great difficulty coming to terms with this new world, and much of it preferred to operate by denying that there was a new situation and a new stabilization. So the anti-Zionist denial about how the world had changed following the Second World War could be understood as only a part of a much wider failure to come to terms with a new situation.

Some on the Trotskyist left remained for decades in a state of frenzy, convinced that this was the moment of the final crisis of capitalism and of state ‘socialism’. Others eventually over-embraced the new situation and became convinced that the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, and China were, after all, in spite of their evident failings, in some sense an advance on capitalism: they embraced one side of Trotsky’s pre-war programme, ‘defend the Soviet Union’. By this route, many on the Trotskyist left managed to downplay their opposition to the ‘bureaucracy’ in favour of defending the ‘workers’ states’ against imperialism. In this way Marxist politics, for some, was radically transformed. It used to be a programme for the transformation of society from the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie into a democratic and free community of producers; yet many now saw their immediate task not as siding with the workers, or with the oppressed in general, but as siding with ‘progressive’ states against imperialist ones. Whereas classical internationalism was a programme of common struggle against capitalism, it now became a programme of taking sides in geopolitical power struggles.²⁴

But the Soviet flag was not the first national flag that had been waved by some on the left. The first, perhaps, was the Tricolor of revolutionary France. France, and later

²⁴ One consequence of this was that very few Trotskyists later defended the right of Soviet Jews to leave the USSR, and very few spoke up for dissidents like Andrei Sakharov.

Russia, were seen by some as universal nations, whose national interest coincided with the interest of humanity (or the working class) as a whole (Fine 2001).

How much easier to ally with some actually existing state than with a set of cosmopolitan politics? And later other options emerged - Cuba, Nicaragua, Venezuela. For some it didn't matter that the leaders of the good 'progressive' nations wore military uniforms and had secret police forces and ruled tyrannically over their own populations. What mattered was that there was some actually existing state to which they could attach their feelings of patriotism.

Interestingly, Israel, for some, in its early days, was seen as one of these good nations. The questions that Wheatcroft (2006), for example, asks about Israel and the way that it is thought about in left and liberal circles in the UK, are more interesting than the tentative answers that he offers. He says that people on the left, and liberals, used to love Israel but have now reversed their position,²⁵ and he asks, which is right? He is asking, in effect whether Israel is a good nation or a bad nation, a progressive nation or a threat to progress. This methodologically nationalist framework for thinking is a break from the cosmopolitan tradition of the left, which aimed to unite people in all states against the social and political structures that divided them.

This phenomenon degenerated further for those who substituted victim nations for good nations. Good nations, that is, nations thought to have socialist or progressive regimes, were, some noticed, always opposed by imperialism. So some on the left began to support any regime which opposed imperialism. In this way, left-wing political currents arose which flew the flags of the countries which were opposed by the 'oppressor' nations and some of them, in the name of anti-imperialism, even turned themselves into

²⁵ 'There has, indeed, been a dramatic turn in opinion. It's very hard to recall the esteem and goodwill in which Israel once basked, not least on the broad liberal left, where there is now a received view that Israel has deserved this change in affections: that Israel and Zionism are vicious now, having been virtuous once. The view may be almost universal - but is it true?' Some pinned their hopes on Israel in the early days, as a new social democratic model and were inspired by the bold socialist experiment of the Kibbutz movement. This was mixed with a liberal 'philosemitism' and a feeling of 'horror and shame' about the Holocaust, he tells us. Yet this warmth was only achieved, he says, because the 'right-thinking liberal west closed its eyes at the time' to the 'wholesale expulsion of three-quarters of a million Palestinians in 1948'.

apologists for Saddam Hussein, Slobodan Milosevic, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Kim Jong-il and for the ‘resistance movement’ in Iraq.

Wheatcroft tells us that some people on the left in the 1950s had great illusory hopes in Israel as both a good nation and a victim nation and they began to wave its flag. It is sometimes these same people who have now swung round in disgust when it turns out that Israel is not a utopian beacon for mankind.²⁶ With all the passion of people who have been made fools of by history, and by the crumbling of their own adolescent illusions, sections of the left are now turning on Israel with a rage, a single-mindedness, and an enthusiasm explainable more readily by feelings of betrayal than by looking at the actual nature of the conflict between Israel and Palestine.

Many on the contemporary left split the world into camps. In one camp is imperialism, in the other camp there is the oppressed. Those who adopt this campist view tend not to support the oppressed, but instead to support those who claim to speak for the oppressed and those who (sometimes forcibly) organize the oppressed. They are less concerned than they might be with the question of what kind of society those who speak for the oppressed propose to replace ‘imperialism’ with. The preponderance of this world-view goes some way to explaining why there is so much visceral hatred of Israel on the left, while there is so little anger caused by much greater human rights abuses perpetrated by regimes that are not thought to be ‘imperialist’.

The story goes that Israel is a creature of imperialism or a client state of the USA (putting to one side, for the moment, the story that says Israel controls global imperialism and the USA.). John Rose, for example, relying on Noam Chomsky’s argument that Israel became a ‘strategic asset’ in the securing of US access to Middle Eastern oil, argues that

²⁶ Beller (2007) argues against an attitude which normalizes hostility between Israelis and Palestinians because they are at war, as follows: ‘The ‘It is war!’ argument is really a counsel of despair, and an admission of defeat for the higher values that Israel was meant to achieve. Jews are supposed to value human life above all, not just Jewish life, human life.’ Kuper (2006) argues that it is legitimate to hold Israel to higher standards than other states on the basis that ‘Israel sees itself as a state based “on the precepts of liberty, justice and peace taught by the Hebrew Prophets”. In the words of Isaiah, ‘We are a light unto the nations’’’.

Israel could play its part in helping encase the region in a military structure, which would protect Western oil supplies.... Within just three years of its foundation, its ideologues were ready to tie Israel's survival to the predatory intentions of the 'Western powers'.... Radical nationalism was poised to sweep across the Middle East. Israel's statement of intent could hardly have been more prescient. Israel would indeed become the watchdog. (Rose 2004)

Whether Israel is represented as a part of the white project of colonialism, or as a America's 'strategic asset' in the Middle East, the amount of slippage required to transform Israel into an *essentially* imperialist entity is small. What makes Israel so demonic is an explosive mixture of racism, human rights abuses, and imperialism. Some on the left are not enraged by, or motivated to act in solidarity against, much greater racism and human rights abuses committed by states that are not also 'imperialist'.

There are many disconnects between this worldview and the actual world. One problem is that Israel would not have come into existence when it did without a shift in Soviet policy on the Middle East in the mid 1940s and Soviet bloc support for partition during 1947-1948. Israel's origins are bound up in early Cold War politics and growing US-USSR rivalry. Another problem is that Israel would have been killed at birth in the war of 1948 if it had not been armed by Stalin's Soviet Union against a British and American arms embargo.²⁷ Now perhaps the Soviet Union was also imperialist, so it is after all true that Israel was helped into existence by 'imperialism'. Except that the Czechoslovakian

²⁷ An article in Haaretz, quoted in Hirsh (2006h), gives fascinating details of the military help that flowed from Czechoslovakia to the Jews in Palestine.

'The first arms deal with Czechoslovakia was signed in January 1948 - less than two months after the UN resolution creating Israel and four months before the state was actually established. Immediately after the Partition Plan was passed, Ben-Gurion began searching for sources to supply arms to the Israeli defense forces, but found that the legal sources in the United States and most European countries were closed off to the institutions of the Jewish state in formation. The only alternative seemed to be illegal arms acquisitions and an appeal to the Soviet bloc.'

'As part of the deal signed in January, Czechoslovakia supplied some 50,000 rifles (that remained in use in the IDF for around 30 years), some 6,000 machine guns and around 90 million bullets. But the most important contracts were signed in late April and early May. They promised to supply 25 Messerschmidt fighter planes and arranged for the training - on Czech soil and in Czech military facilities - of Israeli pilots and technicians who would fly and maintain them. The planes, which were disassembled and flown to Israel on large transport planes, after their reassembly played a very important role in halting the Egypt Army's advance south of Ashdod, at a place now called the Ad Halom Junction.'

'The assistance to the air force continued to flow in during the second half of 1948 - when it consisted of 56 Spitfire fighter planes. These were flown to Israel, some of them by Israeli pilots.'

weapons which were smuggled to the Jews in Palestine in 1948, were sent in the name of anti-imperialism by the ‘Communists’, who always denied that they were imperialists. In fact they positioned themselves as part of the ‘oppressed’ which opposed global imperialism. Many of the ‘anti-imperialists’ of today who so despise Israel do not consider the old Soviet empire to have been an imperialist formation.

The leadership of the Jews fighting for a state in Palestine was nationalist and nationalists tend to take help from wherever they can get it. Accepting help from the imperialist Soviet Union against the British Empire and in the face of an American arms embargo was unremarkable in the context of the history of nationalist struggles for independence. In the 1950s the USSR reconstructed its Middle East policy when it realized that it could push its own imperialist ambitions in the Middle East more effectively by backing Arab nationalist regimes against Israel; and the USA gradually came to back Israel against the Soviet backed Arab states. This was routine bloc politics of the Cold War. What is remarkable is the myth that is currently believed by many on the left, that Israel is not at all a nation state like any other but is in reality little more than a creation of, and a creature of, the United States. The assumption that some work with is that Israel was put there by Europe and America in order to facilitate the imperialist domination of the Middle East. Never mind the fact that the US-Israeli alliance, which began to develop in the early 60s, was cemented only after the Six Day War in 1967. Never mind the fact that when the US wants to organize military adventures in the Middle East in the contemporary period, Israel is of no use to it, and it has to rely on Egypt, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and other regimes for air-bases.

Isaac Deutscher, who had lived his early political life in the Yiddish-speaking milieu of the Jewish left in Europe, before the Holocaust, wrote in 1954:

I have, of course, long since abandoned my anti-Zionism, which was based on a confidence in the European labour movement, or, more broadly, in European society and civilization, which that society and civilization have not justified... (Deutscher 1968:111-2, written 1954)

Deutscher dismisses anti-Zionism after the Holocaust without a second thought. It does not seem to have occurred to him that a new anti-Zionist movement might emerge to pump new content into his own political heritage. Yet Deutscher still did not identify

himself as a Zionist. He was interested in coming to a non-nationalist, cosmopolitan analysis and politics. And in response to futile arguments over who started the conflict between Jews and Arabs, he tells the following story:

A man once jumped from the top floor of a burning house in which many members of his family had already perished. He managed to save his life; but as he was falling he hit a person standing down below and broke that person's legs and arms. ... If both behaved rationally, they would not become enemies. ... But look what happens when these people behave irrationally. The injured man blames the other for his misery and swears to make him pay for it. The other, afraid of the crippled man's revenge, insults him, kicks him, and beats him up whenever they meet. ... The bitter enmity, so fortuitous at first, hardens and comes to overshadow the whole existence of both men and to poison their minds. (Deutscher 1968:136-7, from an interview in *New Left Review*, 23 June, 1967)

If we understand the establishment of the state of Israel at least in part in the context of the huge events of the middle of the twentieth century, and if we understand that it has material causes as well as ideational ones, especially in the needs of a persecuted minority in both Europe and the Middle East, then we can see that anti-Zionism in 1929, for example, had a different meaning and content to the one that it has today. The debate now is about different issues. How can Israeli Jews and Palestinians forge a just peace? How can the racist currents within Israel and also within Palestine be defeated politically? How can the tragic history that brought Jews and Palestinians into such a bloody conflict be transcended into the future? But even now, Ghada Karmi (2007), for example, yearns 'to turn back the clock before there was a Jewish state and re-run history from there' (p 265). She still wishes that the 'tormented, suspicious and neurotically self-absorbed community toughened by centuries of the need to survive' had never gone to Palestine (p 120). But the terms of the debate, and what is at stake in the debate, have changed radically since the 1880s and the 1890s and the 1920s.

Norman Finkelstein quotes this very passage from Deutscher and in his attempt to refute its relevance, he exemplifies a number of defining features of left anti-Zionist discourse. He says that

The Zionist denial of Palestinians' rights, culminating in their expulsion, hardly sprang from an unavoidable accident.... It resulted from the systematic and conscientious implementation, over many decades... of a political ideology the goal of which was to create a demographically Jewish state in Palestine.... To claim that Zionist leaders acted irrationally in refusing to 'remove or assuage the grievance' of Palestinians, then, is effectively to say that Zionism is irrational: for, given that the Palestinians' chief grievance was the denial of their homeland, were Zionists to act 'rationally' and remove it, the *raison d'être* of Zionism and its fundamental historic achievement

in 1948 would have been nullified.... To suggest that Zionists had no choice—or, as Deutscher puts it elsewhere, that the Jewish state was a ‘historic necessity’—is to deny the Zionist movement’s massive and, in many respects, impressive exertion of will, and the moral responsibility attending the exertion of this will, in one rather than another direction. (Finkelstein 2005:11).

Here, Finkelstein relies on the assumption of Zionist homogeneity. While anti-Zionists often insist on rhetorically splitting ‘the Zionist leadership’ from the Jews who were persuaded, cajoled, fooled and forced into following, they also tend to insist on the homogeneity of Israelis and their total incorporation into the ideology of ‘Jewish supremacism’. Here Finkelstein bestows his enemy, now collapsed into the phrase ‘the Zionist Movement’, with a satanic greatness, capable of a ‘massive... impressive exertion of will’. He cannot accept Deutscher’s *‘ex post facto’* explanation of Zionism’s transformation from a utopian movement into a state (what other sort of explanation is there?). It can only be explained by the extraordinary (massive, impressive) ‘will’ of Zionism since to accept that Israel’s existence is somehow connected to the Holocaust and to the plight of oppressed Jews would be to muddy the explanatory dualisms upon which anti-Zionism relies; white/non-white; oppressor/oppressed; good nationalism/bad nationalism; coloniser/colonised.

Deutscher says that if both Israelis and Palestinians had behaved rationally then they would have not become enemies. Finkelstein here falls back onto etymological rather than sociological explanation. He replies that the only way that Israel could have made peace with Palestine would have been to dissolve itself, since it was, *by definition*, incapable of living in peace. He says that the Palestinians’ chief grievance was the denial of their homeland and he then says that ‘Zionists’ could only remove this grievence by nullifying the the ‘raison d’être of Zionism’. Deutscher was trying to find a political orientation that could transcend both nationalisms. Finkelstein replies by saying that Israeli nationalism is definitionally racist and so instead of looking for a political orientation that could move beyond nationalism he finds no other option than choosing to support one nationalism against the other; one of the nationalisms, in any case, is often represented by anti-Zionists as an *ersatz* nationalism, a totalitarian movement posing as a nationalism. The ‘raison d’être’ of Zionism would necessarily be removed, for Finkelstein, by a meaningful peace agreement. He goes on:

It's equally fatuous to assert that Palestinians act irrationally when they 'blame' the Zionists 'for their misery' and not accept that they were 'the victim of circumstances over which neither of them had control.' It's only irrational if Zionists bore no responsibility for what happened. (Finkelstein 2005:12)

Here he shifts the frame of the debate. Deutscher is arguing that the foundation of Israel can only be *understood* with reference to the events in Europe that preceded it.

Finkelstein reads Deutscher as using 'the Holocaust' in order to *justify* the unjustifiable. And the only way Finkelstein can frame this claim is by totalizing it. *Either* 'the Zionists' were responsible (hyper-agents with a 'massive' and 'impressive' will) *or* they were innocent refugees (victims), in which case they would have behaved how innocent refugees 'ought' to behave. Finkelstein reads Deutscher as saying that 'Zionists' bore *no* responsibility for the hurt inflicted on Palestine. But what Deutscher seems to be trying to come to terms with is that it is understandable that Jewish refugees were taught to be frightened, angry and distrustful nationalists by their experience in Europe, and later in the Middle East, but that still other outcomes were possible. Events were not determined by the etymological essence of 'Zionism' but rather by 20th century history and by political battles won and lost *amongst* Jews and *amongst* Palestinians.

Anti-Zionism, as well as some opponents of anti-Zionism (e.g. Chesler 2003; Phillips 2006), often construct the struggle over ideas in such a way as to compel one to choose between competing nationalisms. Supporters of each nationalism are tempted to tell the narratives of the Middle East so that we are forced to side with either Israel or with Palestine, against the other. More cosmopolitan approaches attempt to break from this artificial binary, arguing that it is necessary to resist the simple choices we are offered and to go beyond a passive acceptance of the world as it exists. Such an approach would fight against the demonization of Israel and Jews on the one hand but would also reject alternatives and explanations that demonize Muslims and Arabs on the other. A more cosmopolitan approach is not incompatible with those enlightened Israeli and Palestinian nationalist approaches which assume national self-interest to consist firstly in building a political framework whereby both Israel and Palestine can be guaranteed national self-determination.

It is not only Israeli nationalist imaginings of homogeneity that are accepted by left anti-Zionism as a picture of reality, but also Palestinian ones. The Palestinian population, Massad tells us, ‘understood Zionism for what it was and resisted it from its inception in the late nineteenth century’ (Massad 2003:444). This view of the world as being divided into monolithic peoples, with single purposes and understandings is recurrent in both Zionist and anti-Zionist writing. He repeats this claim in a debate with Benny Morris (Whitehead 2002:213): ‘From the Palestinian perspective, the nature of Zionism has always been clear.’ He writes as though there was a single Palestinian perspective. But this perspective, it seems is not always the one of the Palestinian *leadership*, which, during the Oslo process, Massad tells us, accepted ‘in many ways, *the Zionist* version, both of Jewish and Palestinian histories, and succumbed to it.’ (Whitehead 2002:213). He writes, that is, as if there was only one Zionist version of history. ‘The people’ have always understood everything clearly; the leadership was corrupted and bought off by the enemies of the people.

He also says that he is in favour of the ‘continuing resistance of Palestinians in Israel and the occupied territories to all the civil and military institutions that uphold Jewish supremacy’ (Massad 2003:450). The apparently straightforward statement of solidarity also hides and glosses over the centrally important political distinctions in Palestine. Does Massad understand the suicide bombing of buses, restaurants and nightclubs to constitute ‘resistance’ to institutions that uphold ‘Jewish supremacy’? Does he understand Hamas and Hezbollah, with their clearly antisemitic rhetoric, to be a part of that ‘resistance’? Palestine is presented as a monolithic anti-colonialist nationalist struggle, although held back by corrupt leaders. It is presented as though there were no politics in Palestine, no differences of attitude amongst Palestinians to the presence of Jews and to the presence of Israel in the Middle East. There is only the authentic resistance of the Palestinian people and the pro-Zionist collaboration of their leaders. Later, Massad (2006) threw his political weight behind the openly antisemitic Hamas movement and he characterized the secular nationalist tradition of the Fatah leadership in Palestine as being a ‘collaborationist’ one, subservient to Israeli interest. Since the Hamas coup in Gaza against the Palestinian Presidency, it is becoming more common in the UK, both on the far left but also in mainstream liberal opinion, to understand Hamas

as the single authentic voice of Palestine - and Fatah, therefore, as a pro-imperialist gang of Quislings.²⁸

Massad says that if Jews were to give up their ‘Jewish supremacist’ ideology and allow Palestinians the ‘right of return’, then any threat to Jews would disappear (Massad 2003:449). Terrorist threats to Jews, as well as antisemitism in the Middle East, and across the world, is thought of by many anti-Zionists as being a (legitimate? understandable? predictable?) response to Zionism. In this paradigm ‘Zionism’ is responsible for the increase in antisemitism; antisemites are in this way, absolved of responsibility, as well as human agency. Anti-Jewish racism is understood by anti-Zionists as being a profoundly different sort of racism to other racisms. Other racisms are not normally analyzed by antiracists in terms of what it is that the victims of those racisms are doing to make people hate them.²⁹

The assumption of Palestinian homogeneity is based on a romantic picture of the Palestinian national movement. Yet in truth Palestinian nationalism has always been greatly influenced by the requirements of pan-Arab nationalist narratives and more recently, of the global Islamist movement. And these narratives undergo further degradation and simplification before they become part of left commonsense in Britain. They become further removed from an achievable conception of Palestinian national interest. Questions concerning a conflict of interest between Palestinian nationalism and Arab nationalism or Islamism, are regarded with suspicion. One of the tropes of anti-Zionism is a refusal to take seriously the conflicting interests of Palestinians and Arab states and an unwillingness to allow oneself to be moved by the history of exploitation, repression, killing, moving on, and instrumentalization of Palestinians by Arab regimes. It is understood in anti-Zionist circles that great suspicion should fall on anyone who asks questions about the treatment of Palestinians in Arab states. Anyone who asks how it is

²⁸ ‘The stunning military victory by the Palestinian Hamas movement over the rival Fatah organisation in the Gaza Strip last week was a strike against imperialism in the Middle East.’ (Assaf 2007); ‘We should hope – that may be all we can now do – that moderate Islamist movements manage to navigate these turbulent times, in spite of European attempts to prevent Islamism, which is clearly now the dominant regional current, from reshaping Middle Eastern societies.’ (Cooke 2007)

²⁹ Compare with this statement from the right wing antisemite, Holocaust denier and anti-Zionist, David Irving: “They [Jews] should ask themselves the question, ‘Why have they been so hated for 3000 years that there has been pogrom after pogrom in country after country?’” (Barkat 2006)

that Palestinians in those states have not been allowed to integrate into society but have been kept separate and rightless as refugees, is suspected of preparing a ‘Zionist’ denial which may hold Arab regimes or Arab nationalism at least partly responsible for the misery of Palestinians. While anger with (American backed) Arab regimes may be appropriate in anti-Zionist circles, it is never allowed to disrupt the central truth, which is that Palestinians and Arabs in general are the victims of Israel and of America, and of nobody else. When Palestinians have been victimized by other Arabs, it often turns out that imperialism was the moving force behind that victimization either through Zionist machinations or through American-backed puppets, or as a result of the legacy of European colonialism. Hostility to Israel is such a deeply ingrained commonsense for many on the left that they often forget to ask what function anti-Zionism plays for the Arab ruling elites.

There are more questions which are widely understood to be forbidden, in the anti-Zionist universe, which are excluded from the narrative. We have already touched on the ways in which certain kinds of narrative of the Holocaust are suspect if they seem to be mobilized towards an effort to justify Israeli crimes or to construct ‘Zionism’ as some kind of a Jewish liberation movement. If Holocaust narratives disrupt the simple Israelis-as-oppressors, Palestinians-as-oppressed binary, then they become not quite respectable in the anti-Zionist imagination. It is respectable to talk about how the Holocaust is abused by Israel as a discourse of legitimization.³⁰ It is respectable to understand Holocaust Memorial Day as an attack on British Muslims (Sacranie 2005).³¹ But it is highly suspect in anti-Zionist circles to argue that it was the Holocaust which transformed the material condition of Europe such that ‘Zionism’ was transformed from a utopian minority idea among Jews into a majority one and, amidst the decline of Britain and the growing American-Soviet Cold War rivalry, into a nation state.

³⁰ Judith Butler in conversation with Jacqueline Rose, 22 September 2005, ‘Holocaust Premises: Political Implications of the Traumatic Frame’, Senate House, London

³¹ ‘So we said that our common humanity called upon us to also recognize the crimes perpetrated against other people, and we called for the establishment of an EU genocide memorial day. Such a day would help dispel the - frankly racist - notion that some people are to be regarded as being more equal than others.’ Sacranie went on to claim that ‘Every year since the HMD [Holocaust Memorial Day] was inaugurated in 2001, the MCB [Muslim Council of Britain] has been subjected to intimidating smears of antisemitism in the press. We have been accused of wanting to ‘scrap’ the HMD out of ‘hatred’ of the Jewish people. This is hysterical nonsense. (Sacranie 2005)

Another forbidden question is to ask how and why Jews were almost entirely pushed out of all the Middle Eastern states in the 1950s and 60s. The forced movement of Palestinians from Israeli held territory in 1948 is the original sin which forever renders Israel uniquely illegitimate. The forced movement of Jews from the whole of the Middle East to Israel, however, is often represented a more or less free choice; it is explained as the result of ‘Zionist’ agents provocateur manufacturing the antisemitism (or perhaps the justified anger with Israel?) which forced the Jews out of the great cosmopolitan cities of the Middle East, Baghdad, Cairo, Beirut, Damascus, and the rest. There is a right and justified anti-Zionist concern to disallow attempts to minimize or deny the suffering of Palestinians in 1948, and their subsequent partial exclusion from Israeli territory. Yet this concern can lead anti-Zionists to turn their eyes away from the wholesale expulsion of Jews from the Middle East as part of the Arab nationalist consolidation of ethnically defined *Arab* nation states.³² Sometimes there are attempts to square the circle by portraying Jews who were pushed out of the Arab states as being really Arabs, who are, alongside other Arabs, victims of Ashkenazi or ‘white’ Jewish supremacism. In this narrative, the reality of the power divide in Israel between Jews of European and Middle Eastern descent is fitted into a binary worldview that raises the power differences between ‘white’ imperialism and the rest of the world to an absolute and which subsumes all other difference. Many Jews of Middle Eastern descent who live in Israel would be astonished to learn that some people in the west regard them as Arabs who are oppressed by ‘white’ Jews.

Although I have referred to the myth of Palestinian homogeneity as a *romantic* nationalism it is actually, perhaps, more ‘orientalist’ (Said 1978) than it is benevolent. A respectful way to relate to Palestinians is not to pretend that they all think the same thing but to consider the plurality of different ways of thinking and different politics and different choices that are evident amongst Palestinians. The cosmopolitan project is precisely based on disrupting and challenging myths of national homogeneity (Hirsh 2003; Fine 2007) rather than giving them a left-wing stamp of authenticity.

³² There may well have been a few Zionist agent provocateurs and there were Zionists who wanted Jews from the Middle East to go to Israel; but it requires a willingness to stretch the facts hugely to give these factors such explanatory dominance; see for example, Shibliak (2005) on how Jews were pushed out of Iraq, and Hakakian (2004) on how Jews were pushed out of Iran.

Nothing is gained by infantilizing Palestinians. For example, there is a problem of antisemitism amongst Palestinians. Hamas, the most electorally popular party in Palestine, is explicitly founded on an Islamist version of the Protocols of the Elders of Zion. It is far from surprising that people who live under the occupation of an overwhelmingly Jewish army may be susceptible to antisemitism. But to treat that antisemitism as though it was entirely unmediated by human agency or by political choices looks rather orientalist. Most Arabs are not under occupation, yet antisemitism in predominately Arab or Muslim countries is also excused or underplayed. It is underplayed either by pretending that it is nothing but an epiphenomenon of the conflict and has no life or emergent properties independent of it; or by pretending that antisemitism is a European colonialist invention and import into the Middle East, and therefore, people in the Middle East bear no responsibility for it and are incapable of being authentically antisemitic. Other patronizing defences are attempted: for example that Arabic is too simple a language to cope with the (complex) distinction between Israeli and Jew, and so when people express hatred for Jews, it is only because they are not capable of the clarity required to express their hatred of Israelis.³³

Anti-Zionism tends to treat Palestine as one entity with a simple unifying narrative. It is common to hear anti-Zionists declare that the conflict is actually simple in spite of dishonest ‘Zionist’ attempts to introduce obfuscating complexity. Campaigns of boycott, disinvestment and sanctions against Israel are inspired by a fundamentally nationalist view of the world. They treat Israel and Palestine as single entities which must be either supported or punished. They thereby seek to make the cosmopolitan project of relating to differences within those nations, and commonalities between groups in both nations, impossible. Attempts to make alliances between democrats, antiracists and peace-seekers within each nation and against the racists and those who seek all out victory in both nations, are disrupted by good-nation / bad-nation nationalist worldviews.

³³ I have heard this defence made by a British academic in a debate about antisemitism.

(iii) A simple picture of oppressed and oppressors

Since before it existed, Israel has been engaged in two struggles with its neighbours. One is a just war, waged by Palestinian Arabs for freedom - which became a struggle for Palestinian national independence; the other is a genocidal war that aims to end, or at least subjugate, Jewish life in the Middle East. It is my argument that a cosmopolitan framework should insist on the reality of this distinction and it should challenge those who recognize the reality of only one or other of these two separate wars.

However in the summer of 2006, when Israeli tanks were stalking through the crowded streets of Gaza, when Katyusha rockets were slamming into a deserted Haifa, when Israeli F16s were blowing up buildings in the suburbs of Beirut and when Israeli soldiers were being held in underground dungeons waiting for their own beheading to be broadcast on al-Jazeera, the distinction seemed entirely notional.

Many people believe the war for Palestinian independence is a pretend war which functions only to give a liberational facade to the real war of annihilation; many others believe the war of annihilation is an Israeli propaganda invention that functions only to allow Israel to thwart the just demands of the Palestinians - an invocation of the Holocaust as a blank cheque.

An interesting feature of social reality is that if enough people believe something to be true, and act as though it is true, then it may indeed become the truth. So if Israelis believe they are only ever fighting a war of survival, then they will use tactics and strategies which are appropriate to the war they believe themselves to be fighting. If Palestinians, meanwhile, come to believe that they can win their freedom only by destroying Israel, then they may come to think of Hamas, Hizbullah, al-Qaeda and the Iranian regime as their allies.

The way out is for cosmopolitan voices and political movements to insist on the reality of both wars and to separate them conceptually; to stand clearly for a Palestinian victory in the fight for freedom and equally clearly for an Israeli victory in the fight against annihilation.

There is a left ‘common sense’ in the UK that sees only one struggle going on - a war of the oppressed against the oppressors. This way of thinking denies that there is a substantial project to annihilate Israel and it insists that this is in any case not an immediate prospect because Israel is so heavily armed. But there really is a set of serious global political movements which aim to kill or subjugate the Jews of Israel. Such a movement rules in Iran and was elected into office in Palestine, it occupies southern Lebanon, it took power in Gaza, it has a foothold in Iraq and it has significant popular support across the Middle East and further afield.

If some people on the left are relying on Israel’s military superiority to guarantee its survival, then they must, logically, if they are in favour of its survival, also be in favour of Israel’s allies, particularly the US, helping to maintain Israeli military superiority. But it seems more likely that an atmosphere is building on parts of the British left that would lead many to respond to the annihilation of Israel by saying: ‘This second genocide of the Jews is genuinely tragic, but really, they have only themselves to blame.’ Israeli Jews would be making a mistake if they relied on the solidarity of the British left to protect them from those who say they would like to slaughter them.

Meanwhile, the left in Israel is unable to insist on the reality of the just struggle for Palestinian independence. Much of the Israeli left was convinced in 2000 that Palestine had rejected at least a partial victory in its war for statehood in favour of the hope for victory in the war for Israeli annihilation. But there are still those in Israel and Palestine who have not given up on the project of separating the two wars.

The collapse of the peace process convinced many Palestinians that the war for independence could never be won and that their only option was to back the jihadi Islamist movements against the Jews. Yet Palestinian nationalism, the movement for Palestinian independence, has not yet been entirely defeated by the jihadis Islamists.

Even if events march on, and cosmopolitan perspectives continue to be defeated, it is still the job of the left to represent conceptually - even if it is unable to do so materially - a different possible direction. The wars of annihilation can only end in ever deepening horror; the struggle for peace and freedom can end in peace and freedom.

It is as necessary to keep challenging those who think that the only real war is an Israeli war of survival, as it is to challenge those who think that the only real war is against the Israeli oppressor. The cosmopolitan left needs to think differently, and it has to create a different reality. It is on the side of the Palestinian struggle for independence and it is on the side of the Israeli struggle against the jihadists (not to mention the Palestinian, Iranian, Syrian, Egyptian and Lebanese struggle against the jihadists, as well as the trade union, socialist, democratic, lesbian and gay, feminist and secular struggles against them).

But that's absurd, cries one camp: the jihadists are currently dictating the Palestinian struggle, and it is no longer a struggle for Palestinian independence. Hasn't it become one struggle? Hasn't it always been one struggle, Jews against Arabs? 'We offered them peace and they chose war - then they started raining missiles down on our heads.'

And the other side insists: 'Barak's offer during the Oslo Peace process was to set Palestinian oppression in stone for ever, it was not an offer of Palestinian liberty. He offered slavery, not freedom. You talk about the annihilation of Israel, but it is Palestine that is prevented from existing – Israel assuredly exists. It has destroyed the project of Palestinian liberation.'

Is it a war of annihilation or a war of liberation? Both wars are real, even if only in our minds. But human beings have the capacity to make some impact on the world, to work for change, according to what is in our minds, and that is the cosmopolitan project in Israel and in Palestine.

PART II **ANTISEMITISM AND CRITICISM OF ISRAEL: DISCOURSE**

Part I looked at the context of anti-Zionist thought and movements and it looked at the assumptions, methodology and tropes of antiracist anti-Zionism in particular. It critically engaged with the central concepts of this movement and it looked at how some currents of the left find themselves in a position where a politics of demonization appears to be a natural left-wing response to the Israel-Palestine conflict. Section II moves on from a conceptual discussion to an empirical analysis of a number of actualizations of those concepts in public discourse. The case studies are chosen because they illustrate particular tendencies which shed light on the actualization of anti-Zionism in a form which is related directly to antisemitism. Part III then looks at boycott campaigns, which aim to transform conceptual and discursive texts into concrete exclusions of human beings.

(i) Denying antisemitism: ‘Intensified criticism’ of Israel and the Zionist manufacture of the antisemitism charge

Steven Beller (2007:223), relying on Tony Judt and Antony Lerman as authorities, states that ‘the claims of a sudden, horrendous burgeoning of antisemitism in Europe are incorrect.’ Antony Lerman (2007) articulates the position as follows:

Pro-Israel and Zionist groups have interpreted intensified criticism of Israel and anti-Zionism as the expression of a ‘new antisemitism’. The [Independent Jewish Voices] initiative leans towards the view that this charge is far too often used in an attempt to stifle strong criticism of Israeli policies.

Part II presents an extensive survey and analysis of a number of key examples of what Lerman refers to as ‘intensified’ or ‘strong’ criticism of Israel. These examples are not narratives of straightforward antisemitism but they do raise questions about what kinds of intensification of criticism we are seeing. They are selected because they exemplify particular kinds of intensification; they are examples of discourse which take the form of exaggerated hostility to Israel. The analysis aims to explore whether and how those case

studies mirror antisemitic discourse, rhetoric, images, texts or tropes. The majority of these case studies relate to public social and political actors in predominately British public life, and nearly all of the contested narratives have already been discussed in the public sphere.

Underpinning Lerman's formulation of the problem are two assumptions. First, that those who are concerned with antisemitism related to hostility to Israel are 'pro-Israel' or 'Zionist' and second, that the articulation of this concern often constitutes a dishonest but collective attempt to 'stifle strong criticism of Israeli policies'. In other words the debate over contemporary antisemitism is congruent with the debate over how strongly Israel should be criticized for its abuses of human rights. If you are very strongly critical of Israeli human rights abuses then you will also believe that concern about a 'new antisemitism' is misplaced because this concern blunts and 'stifles' deserved criticism. If, on the other hand, you are worried about 'new antisemitism' then you will also be 'pro-Israel' or 'Zionist' and therefore, it is thought, reluctant to criticize or recognize Israeli human rights abuses.

These are strange underpinnings for a discussion of the danger of racism against Jews. Firstly because they assume that criticism is something purely quantitative. How strongly critical are you of Israel on a scale of one to ten? But criticism contains both qualitative and quantitative components. The nature of a criticism is as important as its intensity. The Hamas Covenant (Hamas 1988) articulates a strong critique of Israel but it is also antisemitic; moreover the Hamas critique of Israeli human rights abuses, given its own politics and practice, is unconvincing. At the time of the invasion of Jenin by Israeli forces in 2002, there was much 'strong' and 'intense' criticism; people screamed that there was a massacre and a genocide and a Holocaust being perpetrated by Israel. Such overblown claims that Israel was killing for the sake of killing and that Israel was just like the Nazis, allowed the Sharon government to plead, in good faith, not guilty. Criticism was strong and intense but it lacked truth and it lacked political clarity. It was ineffective not because it was 'strong' or 'intense' but because of its quality. And one aspect of its quality was that it relied upon and it reproduced a view of Israel (and the

Jews who do not sufficiently distance themselves from it) as being uniquely evil in the world.³⁴

Antisemitic opposition to Israel does not constitute ‘strong’ or ‘intense’ criticism of Israeli human rights abuses. On the contrary, such criticism harms those who fight for peace and against racism; it does damage to the Palestinian struggle for independence, freedom and democracy. It is the quality of intensification of criticism rather than the intensification itself that is crucial to the discussion of the relationship between hostility to Israel and antisemitism. Howard Jacobson (2007) puts it like this:

Critical - as though those who accuse Israel of every known crime against humanity, of being more Nazi than the Nazis, more fascist than the fascists, more apartheid than apartheid South Africa, are simply exercising measured argument and fine discrimination.

I know a bit about being critical. It’s my job. Being ‘critical’ is when you say that such-and-such a book works here but doesn’t work there, good plot, bad characterisation, enjoyed some parts, hated others. What being critical is not, is saying this is the most evil and odious book ever written, worse than all other evil and odious books, should never have been published in the first place, was in fact published in flagrant defiance of international law, must be banned, and in the meantime should not under any circumstances be read. For that we need another word than critical.

One wonders whether the fatwa calling for the execution of Salman Rushdie could be considered to be literary criticism.

³⁴ For an account of some of the things that Israeli forces actually did during the invasion, see (Yeheskeli 2002): ‘Difficult? No way. You must be kidding. I wanted to destroy everything. I begged the officers, over the radio, to let me knock it all down; from top to bottom. To level everything. It’s not as if I wanted to kill. Just the houses. We didn’t harm those who came out of the houses we had started to demolish, waving white flags. We screwed just those who wanted to fight. … No one refused an order to knock down a house. No such thing. When I was told to bring down a house, I took the opportunity to bring down some more houses; not because I wanted to - but because when you are asked to demolish a house, some other houses usually obscure it, so there is no other way. I would have to do it even if I didn’t want to. They just stood in the way. If I had to erase a house, come hell or high water - I would do it. And believe me, we demolished too little. The whole camp was littered with detonation charges. What actually saved the lives of the Palestinians themselves, because if they had returned to their homes, they would blow up. … For three days, I just destroyed and destroyed. The whole area. Any house that they fired from came down. And to knock it down, I tore down some more. They were warned by loudspeaker to get out of the house before I come, but I gave no one a chance. I didn’t wait. I didn’t give one blow, and wait for them to come out. I would just ram the house with full power, to bring it down as fast as possible. I wanted to get to the other houses. To get as many as possible. Others may have restrained themselves, or so they say. Who are they kidding? Anyone who was there, and saw our soldiers in the houses, would understand they were in a death trap. I thought about saving them. I didn’t give a damn about the Palestinians, but I didn’t just ruin with no reason. It was all under orders.’

So there follows a discussion of a number of contested cases. They are not necessarily examples of antisemitic criticism of Israel – such examples are easy to find, for example in the official ideology of Hamas, Hezbollah and the current Iranian presidency, and they pose no analytic ambiguity. Rather, the examples that follow are examples of what Lerman refers to as ‘intensification’ of criticism. The particular forms that intensification takes are more relevant than the degrees of intensification.

(a) The Mayor of London: deny antisemitism, cry Israel

In September 2006 the report of the British Parliamentary Inquiry into Antisemitism was published. Norman Finkelstein (2006) responded to this publication with a piece on his website in which he alleges that the Parliamentary report was published as a response to the Israel-Hezbollah war in order to deflect attention from Israel’s ‘murderous destruction of Lebanon’.³⁵ It is difficult to see how this claim could be true, since the report was being planned, written and researched before the war began; if true, it must rely on the premise that an all-party committee of British MPs was acting pre-emptively to protect Israel from criticism of a war which had not yet started.³⁶ Finkelstein is articulating the claim that the issue of antisemitism is raised dishonestly in order to de-legitimize Israeli human rights abuses. This thought is communicated by four expressive words which constitute the title of his piece: ‘Kill Arabs, Cry Antisemitism’. This charge is frequently made by anyone who is accused of failing to be careful about antisemitism and its very invocation is itself almost inevitably an indication of a failure to take antisemitism seriously.

I will refer to the claim that people are accused of antisemitism in order to de-legitimize their criticisms of Israeli human rights abuses as the *Livingstone formulation*,

³⁵ ‘...predictably, just after Israel faced another image problem due to its murderous destruction of Lebanon, a British all-party parliamentary group led by notorious Israel-firster Denis MacShane MP (Labor) released yet another report alleging a resurgence of antisemitism’ (Finkelstein (2006))

³⁶ Later in this piece, Finkelstein sneeringly wonders whether Israel could organise a Berlin ‘Berlin airlift’ of gefilte fish to Jewish students. This is his response to a recommendation in the parliamentary report that Jewish students ought not to be excluded from events due to the lack of kosher food. The piece is illustrated by a picture of a can of gefilte fish attached to a parachute.

since, in the story that follows, the Mayor of London employed it most effectively. The *Livingstone formulation* often expresses a reversal of the truth. Ken Livingstone accuses the Board of Deputies of British Jews of ‘crying antisemitism’ as a response to his own criticism of Israel, but in reality, he himself ‘cried Israel’ in response to criticism of his own, albeit trivial, late-night antisemitic insults – and his perhaps less trivial refusal to acknowledge them or to apologize for them. His insults were entirely unconnected to Israel or to its human rights abuses. The interesting thing about Ken Livingstone’s brushes with antisemitism is that they apparently do him no damage, either in terms of popular support or in terms of the support of the antiracist left.

Oliver Finegold, a journalist for the *Evening Standard*, approached the Mayor as he left a party, late at night, at City Hall, 8 February 2005.

Finegold: Mr Livingstone, Evening Standard. How did tonight go?³⁷

Livingstone: How awful for you. Have you thought of having treatment?

Finegold tries again.

Finegold: How did tonight go?

Livingstone: Have you thought of having treatment?

Finegold tries a third time:

Finegold: Was it a good party? What does it mean for you?

Mr Livingstone: What did you do before? Were you a German war criminal?

Finegold: No, I’m Jewish, I wasn’t a German war criminal and I’m actually quite offended by that. So, how did tonight go?

At this point the Mayor understands that Finegold is Jewish and that he finds being compared to a ‘German war criminal’ offensive. And he has a tape recorder running. So how does Livingstone react? He thinks he’s onto something clever, so he clarifies his point:

Mr Livingstone: Arr right, well you might be [Jewish], but actually you are just like a concentration camp guard, you are just doing it because you are paid to, aren’t you?

³⁷ This transcript comes from the website of the Evening Standard, [www.ThisIsLondon.co.uk, http://www.thisislondon.co.uk/news/article-16539119-details/Who+said+what+when+Ken+clashed+with+reporter/article.do;jsessionid=NjTNFgBNyY7yGVy6SxGyvCpgV321w3WPvhfh29jJXGNB0TxpTLT!-749300803!-1407319224!7001!-1](http://www.thisislondon.co.uk/news/article-16539119-details/Who+said+what+when+Ken+clashed+with+reporter/article.do;jsessionid=NjTNFgBNyY7yGVy6SxGyvCpgV321w3WPvhfh29jJXGNB0TxpTLT!-749300803!-1407319224!7001!-1), 11 February 2005, downloaded 24 February 2007.

Finegold is hanging around outside City Hall trying to get a comment from the Mayor because it is his job. This, according to Livingstone, is ‘just like’ someone who participated in the Nazi genocide of Jews during the Second World War. The Mayor thinks that being a journalist for the *Evening Standard* is ‘bad’ in an analogous way as taking part in genocide is ‘bad’ – and both are done by people who are only doing their jobs.³⁸

Finegold: Great, I have you on record for that. So, how was tonight?

Mr Livingstone: It’s nothing to do with you because your paper is a load of scumbags and reactionary bigots.

Maybe Ken is drunk? He later denied it. Ken Livingstone has, in his time, dealt with all the newspapers, owned by all kinds of ‘scumbags and reactionary bigots’. He has worked for *The Evening Standard* and he has worked for the notorious left-baiting Murdoch tabloid, *The Sun*.

Finegold: I’m a journalist and I’m doing my job. I’m only asking for a comment.

Mr Livingstone: Well, work for a paper that doesn’t have a record of supporting fascism.

So Livingstone goes home and the story breaks the next day.³⁹ Why does he not just apologize? ‘Sorry I was a bit drunk, I was tired, it was late, I was fed up with being chased around by reporters, and I said some silly things.’ This would have solved the problem. But Livingstone decided not to apologize.

What if it had been a black journalist? ‘What did you do before, were you a plantation owner?’ ‘No, I’m black, I wasn’t a plantation owner, and I’m quite offended by that.’ ‘Well you might be black but actually you’re just like a plantation owner...’

After Livingstone has had two weeks to think about it, he insists (Livingstone 2005) that his responses to Finegold were appropriate. He says *The Evening Standard*, as well as *Associated Press*, which owns it, have treated him badly in the past and it has now overstated this story in order to damage him politically. He points out that in July 1992 (13 years ago) there was a party at the *Daily Mail* where people dressed up in Nazi

³⁸ For a full discussion of Zygmunt Bauman’s sociological analysis of the relationship between instrumental rationality and the decision to commit a crime against humanity in *Modernity and the Holocaust*, see Hirsh (2003) chapter 2.

³⁹ It is not broken by Finegold because he feels insulted but by someone else who heard the conversation.

uniforms as fancy dress and *Associated Press* has not apologized for that. He says that the *Daily Mail* campaigned to bar Jews from entering Britain before 1905 (100 years ago). And the *Daily Mail* supported the British Union of Fascists in the 1930s (70 years ago). He says that in 1933 (72 years ago), the owner of the *Daily Mail* supported Hitler. In 1938 and 1940, the *Daily Mail* articulated antisemitic policies. And in 2001, a parliamentary sketch in the *Daily Mail* referred to someone in antisemitic language.

I, says Ken Livingstone, am much less antisemitic than the *Daily Mail* and *Associated Press* as though that was an appropriate standard for the antiracist left. I, says Ken, have always fought racism and antisemitism. ‘I’, says Ken ‘regard the positive contribution of the Jewish people to human civilisation as unexcelled’. ‘The public’ says Ken, ‘understand that what is being attempted is a frame up orchestrated by racist sections of the press against someone with a long record of fighting against racism’. But he adds: ‘Over the last two weeks my main concern has been that many Jewish Londoners have been disturbed by this whipped up row.’ Not by Ken’s own behaviour. And then:

I do believe that abdicating responsibility for one’s actions by the excuse that ‘I am only doing my job’ is the thin end of the immoral wedge that at its other extreme leads to the crimes and horrors of Auschwitz, Rwanda and Bosnia. (Livingstone 2005)

Livingstone reacted to criticism by publishing an article in *The Guardian* under the title ‘This is about Israel, not antisemitism’ (Livingstone 2005a), in which he sought to change the topic of discussion by insisting that the problem is not antisemitism but Israel’s human rights abuses. This represents a reversal of the now standard anti-Zionist claim that Jews ‘cry antisemitism’ in order to de-legitimize those who criticize Israel.⁴⁰

The *Livingstone formulation*:

‘For far too long the accusation of antisemitism has been used against anyone who is critical of the policies of the Israeli government, as I have been.’ (Livingstone 2006)

⁴⁰ EG Norman Finkelstein (2005) ‘.... the book’s real purpose will now come into focus: Israel’s horrendous human rights record in the Occupied Territories and the misuse of antisemitism to delegitimize criticism of it.’

EG David Duke (2004a): ‘It is perfectly acceptable to criticize any nation on the earth for its errors and wrongs, but lo and behold, don’t you dare criticize Israel; for if you do that, you will be accused of the most abominable sin in the modern world, the unforgivable sin of antisemitism!’

Here, Livingstone was ‘crying Israel’ in order to de-legitimize those who were concerned about his antisemitic remark. He followed this up with an argument that normalized Palestinian suicide bombing against Israeli civilians. He had unreservedly condemned the suicide attacks on the London transport system on July 7 2005⁴¹ but he found suicide attacks on the Israeli transport system to raise more complex moral and political issues. ‘Palestinians don’t have jet fighters,’ he said at his press conference two weeks later, ‘they only have their bodies to use as weapons. In that unfair balance, that’s what people use’ (quoted in Lappin 2006).⁴²

The Finegold incident, the ‘crying Israel’ as a response to an accusation of antisemitism, and the equivocation over the campaign to kill Israeli civilians were followed a sustained campaign by Livingstone to host and promote the Muslim cleric Yusef al-Qaradawi as a progressive religious figure and a leading Islamic moderate. It should be remembered that in the 1980s Ken Livingstone was widely recognized as a leading figure in municipal rainbow alliance politics, the movement which the political right shrilly and apocryphally denounced as ‘political correctness gone mad’.

Now, Livingstone was hosting Qaradawi, a man who supported the indiscriminate killing of Israeli civilians in the name of Muslim anti-Zionism. Participation in ‘martyr operations’ in Palestine, he had claimed, ‘is one of the most praised acts of worship’. He also taught that ‘apostates’ from Islam ought to be killed, that a ‘Muslim husband is to order his wife to wear hijab’; that a man may admonish his wife ‘lightly with his hands’;

⁴¹ Livingstone (2005b) ‘This was a cowardly attack... It was an indiscriminate attempt to slaughter, irrespective of any considerations for age, for class, for religion, or whatever.’

⁴² ‘First, [Livingstone] treats ordinary Israelis as unique in excluding them from the status of non-combatants accorded to civilians in any other conflict. But if the obvious asymmetry between the Israeli army and Palestinian irregulars is the basis for this move, then why are British and American civilians exempt from being construed as legitimate targets of terror attacks launched by opponents of the occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan, where powerful armies battle militarily weak insurgency forces? In short, what basis is there for Livingstone’s resolute condemnation of Islamist terror in London, which can be excused and understood on grounds similar to those invoked in the case of Palestinian suicide bombing?’

‘Passing over the fact that political expediency (more accurately, political survival) would prevent the Mayor from applying his views consistently, even if he chose to do so, the effect of his exceptionalist treatment of Israeli civilians is to reinforce the idea that it is not simply Israel’s policies which are worthy of opposition, but its existence as a country that is intolerable. The behaviour of the Israeli government has deprived its people of any collective legitimacy. Hence they are understandable (and so, ultimately, acceptable) targets of violence.’ (Lappin 2006)

that the appropriate state punishment for homosexuality is death (Tatchell 2005)⁴³. When leader of the Greater London Council in the 1980s it would have been inconceivable that Livingstone would have hosted such a figure. In praising Mel Gibson's 'The Passion of the Christ' a year later, Qaradawi said:

In this film there is an important positive aspect. The positive aspect lies in its exposing the Jews' crime of bringing Jesus to the crucifixion.... More than 30 years ago, the Vatican issued a document, exonerating the Jews of [spilling] the blood of Jesus. Not all Christians accepted this document. The Pope in the Vatican and the Catholics are the ones who exonerated them. They exonerated them under political pressure., I say that the Jews of the 21st century adopt what the Jews of the first century did. They adopt what [their forefathers] did to Jesus, and so they bear responsibility for it, unless they renounce it, saying: This was a crime, and we ask Allah to absolve us of it. But they have not said this, and therefore, the Jews of today bear responsibility for the deeds of the Jews of yesterday.' (Al Qaradawi 2006).

The London Assembly and the Culture Secretary called for Livingstone to apologize for the Finegold incident. Livingstone insisted that he 'stood by his remarks'. (news.BBC.co.uk 2005)⁴⁴ Following Livingstone's refusal to apologize,⁴⁵ the Board of

⁴³ City Hall published a glossy brochure to defend Livingstone's links with Qaradawi (Mayor of London 2005). The brochure defends Qaradawi against charges of antisemitism, quoting him as follows: 'we do not hold any enmity towards the Jews'. The brochure argues that 'In contrast to claims that he makes 'no distinction between Jews and Israelis' ... and 'uses sermons to call for Jews – not Israelis but specifically Jews – to be killed'...., Qaradawi has repeatedly emphasised that 'we do not fight Israelis because they are Jews but because they took our land, killed our children and profaned our holy places''. But this defence is not convincing. Whether the Mayor of London's Office's defence of Qaradawi was in good faith or not is unknown; it has not responded to Qaradawi's subsequent exegesis of classic antisemitic blood libel.

One method of responding to criticism of Qaradawi by the Mayor's brochure, has been to attack MEMRI, the Middle East Media Research Institute, which has produced some of the translations of Qaradawi's views from the original Arabic. MEMRI is run out of Washington DC by a former member of the Israeli security services, Yigal Carmon. Its translations are therefore easily ignorable as 'Zionist' or 'Mossad' propaganda. Whitaker (2002) argues that MEMRI's translations are highly selective and therefore unrepresentative; Yigal Carmon (2002) responds in *The Guardian*. *The Guardian* carries an email debate between the two in 2003 (Carmon & Whitaker 2003).

Qaradawi's position on Jewish-Muslim dialogue is also clear enough: 'There is No Dialogue between Us and the Jews Except by the Sword and the Rifle'. Also: 'The iniquity of the Jews, as a community, is obvious and apparent. Let me explain: The West, I can say about some of them [i.e., Westerners] who are iniquitous, and others who are not iniquitous. And it is possible. But iniquity on the part of the Jews is great iniquity, grave iniquity, iniquity that is incomparable and overt. Therefore, when it was suggested to me that Jews would be participating in the dialogue in the upcoming interview, I rejected this. I said no, we should not conduct a dialogue with these [people] while their hands are stained with our blood.' (MEMRI 2004)

⁴⁴ Livingstone: 'If I could in anything I say relieve any pain anyone feels I would not hesitate to do it but it would require me to be a liar....I could apologize but why should I say words I do not believe in my heart? ...Therefore I cannot. If that is something people find they cannot accept I am sorry but this is how I feel after nearly a quarter of a century of their behaviour and tactics.' (News.BBC.co.uk 2005)

Deputies of British Jews referred the case to the Standards Board for England, a body set up in the wake of the ‘sleaze’ scandals in British public life in the 1990s. The Standards Board eventually ruled that Livingstone’s ‘treatment of the journalist [had been] unnecessarily insensitive and offensive’ and, since it judged that this contravened the *Code of Conduct for Standards in Public Life*, it decided to suspend him from office for four weeks.

A few days after the judgment, Livingstone (2006) responded with a piece in *The Guardian* in which he portrayed himself as the victim of an undemocratic coup.⁴⁵ Who was behind the coup? Livingstone’s attack shifted during the time of the judgment from *Associated Press* to the Board of Deputies for British Jews. The Board of Deputies, Livingstone argued at his press conference, was pursuing a vendetta against him because he is critical of the Israeli government

There are a number of elements to his case against the Board of Deputies. First, they use a charge of antisemitism instrumentally. They do not really believe that Livingstone has done anything antisemitic nor that he has ever behaved in such a way that may have contributed to the propagation of an antisemitic way of thinking. They use the charge disingenuously in order to silence legitimate criticism of Israeli human rights abuses. This charge, of ‘crying antisemitism’ is necessarily a charge of dishonesty and also of conspiracy. Conspiracy, because to believe otherwise would mean that all of the diverse political currents, campaigns, lobbies and writers who make accusations of antisemitism are being dishonest independently but in the same way.

Second, the Board of Deputies, by referring Livingstone to the Standards Committee was responsible for the action that was taken by the Standards Committee.

⁴⁵ From the judgment of the Adjudication Panel of the Standards Board: ‘[The Mayor’s] representative is quite right in saying, ... that matters should not have got as far as this: but it is the Mayor who must take responsibility for this. It was his comments that started the matter and thereafter his position seems to have become ever more entrenched.’

http://www.adjudicationpanel.co.uk/documents/notice_of_decision_ape_0317_revised_copy1.pdf

⁴⁶ ‘The fundamental issue’ he wrote, ‘in this whole affair is not whether or not I was ‘insensitive’, it is the principle that those whom the people elect should only be removed by the people or because they have broken the law.’

Third, that Livingstone's long history of hostility to Israel and to 'Zionism' could be reasonably understood as mere criticism. Worries connected to antisemitism are often raised in response to conspiracy theory, to the demonization of Israel, to those who claim that Israel is uniquely an apartheid or a Nazi state, essentially racist, not a nation but an outpost of imperialism; the *Livingstone formulation* conflates all of these possibilities into mere criticism.

Livingstone does more than 'criticize the policies of the Israeli government'. For decades, he has been part of a movement in the UK that sees Israel as a pariah state with a menacing and malign influence well beyond its borders. In the 1980s Livingstone was associated with the Workers Revolutionary Party, an extreme anti-Zionist group, and was the editor of one of its front organizations, Labour Herald (Matgamna 2003).

This exaggerated hostility to Israel perhaps, is connected to the fact that Livingstone treats the antisemite Qaradawi as an honoured guest; and to the fact that Livingstone is content to employ low-level racist abuse against a Jewish journalist even when he has been told that the journalist finds this offensive; and to the fact that he chose to make a big issue out of this story rather than to back down pragmatically; and to the fact that he reacted with a critique of Ariel Sharon to claims that his own conduct had been offensive. His exaggerated hostility to Israel is, connected to the fact that he opposes the suicide bombing of buses in London but equivocates about the suicide bombing of buses in Tel Aviv.

Livingstone appealed his suspension to the High Court and won. The judgment went out of its way to give an official stamp of authority to the '*Livingstone formulation*'. The High Court judged that Livingstone's subjective feeling of opposing antisemitism was sufficient basis for it to conclude that he has never 'been anti-Semitic' – and it could not 'sensibly' be suggested otherwise. The judgment says that Livingstone has 'not approved of some of the activities of the State of Israel' but 'that has nothing to do with'

antisemitism.⁴⁷ Livingstone's snide insults against Finegold had a connection to Israel or 'Zionism' only inside his own head.

(b) *Comment Is Free*: anti-Zionist rhetoric goes mainstream

Comment Is Free (Cif) was a new initiative started by *The Guardian* newspaper in February 2006. It is a website which brings together the opinion pieces from the printed version of the paper with a large number of pieces written by newly recruited bloggers. Readers are free anonymously to post comments onto any article on *Cif*, whether they were written by journalists employed by the paper or by bloggers who work without pay.⁴⁸ Bloggers are free to submit pieces of writing to the website at any time and they will, in general, appear on the site some hours later.

Cif is interesting in that it allows an unprecedented freedom of expression in a *Guardian* left/liberal space. In the 1980s many of us grew up politically in an environment where there was a strict unwritten code about what may or may not be legitimately said in any left/liberal space. In the summer of 2006 a wave of absolute freedom washed over political discourse in the UK. Racist, sexist and homophobic comments attached themselves to every article on the website that was in any way relevant to these issues. With the anonymity of the medium came a splitting of text from author. Pure text was laid down, line after line, attached to the work of *Guardian* journalists and *Cif* bloggers. Where it came from and what it represented were unanswerable questions. Who was responsible for it? What was the responsibility of *The Guardian* and the *Cif* editors? Were these commenters to be thought of as 'authentic' *Guardian* readers or were they 'trolls' from outside, coming in mischievously to muddy the debate and to pollute the space?

⁴⁷ '12. The Assembly resolution recognized the role played by the appellant in opposing racism and antisemitism. It could not sensibly be suggested that he is or ever has been anti-Semitic. He has not approved of some of the activities of the State of Israel and has made his views about that clear. But that has nothing to do with antisemitism.'

http://www.adjudicationpanel.co.uk/documents/livingstone_v_the_adjudication_panel_2006.pdf

⁴⁸ The bloggers are paid £75 for an article only if it is chosen to appear in the 'Editors Picks' section of the website or if it is commissioned by the editor.

The editors struggled to keep up with the commenters who were breaking their rules. The high volume of material on *Cif* means that it would be a huge task to monitor everything in advance. The editors were reluctant to monitor everything in advance because this would have radically changed the ambitiously open character of the new project.

But more interesting than those commenters who clearly break the boundaries of open sexism, racism and homophobia, are those who take care to remain within the formal boundaries and who thereby protect themselves with the principle of free speech. Let me present just a couple of examples from the summer of 2006 of the kind of comments that were attaching to Jewish or ‘Zionist’ journalists and bloggers on *Cif*. It should be remembered that there is nothing unique about these examples. This kind of comment would inevitably attach itself to all such articles.

Jonathan Freedland (2006) posted a piece on the arrest of Lord Levy in July 2006. He argued that the scandal of loans-for-peerages went to the heart of New Labour’s relationships with corporate power and that Levy would not (and should not) be the fall-guy or the scapegoat for this political problem. Freedland referred to the danger of an antisemitic undercurrent lurking around this story: ‘In the routine descriptions of him as a “flamboyant north London businessman” many in Britain’s Jewish community have long detected old-fashioned prejudice.’ Traditional English antisemitism is gentle and unspoken. It operates through a nudge here and a wink there. So Freedland mentioned it, but it was not the central point of his piece. I will look at just a few responses.

The first is a commenter⁴⁹ by the name of ‘Rodi’, who, at 0323 UK time, offers a Jewish conspiracy story. He links Freedland, who is Jewish, with Levy, who is Jewish, by means of ‘Israel Lobby’ rhetoric.

Is it really a ‘lazy scapegoating’? I do not think so. Let us not forget that Jonathan Freedland was a strong supporter of the war (and of Bus& Blair narratives for its justification) on Iraq until it began to go even worse. He has then tried to distance himself. So I myself will be a little suspicious of what he writes on a subject as this, Lord Levy’s dealings with Blair and the British government at such a critical time. I sense that there is another side of the story, which will hopefully emerge,

⁴⁹ Some of these comments were later deleted by the Cif editorial staff. The text of the comments were recorded in Hirsh (2006i).

even partially. All the records of Lord Levy need a very careful study. The question: is there a strong ‘Israel lobby’ in Britain as well and Lord Levy, a prominent agent of it? The recently published excellent paper on the US Israel lobby by two American professors may provide an example: http://www.lrb.co.uk/v28/n06/mear01_.html

‘Rodi’ is wrong about Freedland being a supporter of the war and a supporter of Bush and Blair’s arguments for the war. In fact Freedland was, from the beginning, an outspoken opponent of the war. ‘Rodi’ uses the respectable language of the ‘Israel lobby’ rather than the discredited language of Jewish conspiracy. S/he explicitly relies on Mearsheimer and Walt (2006a) for legitimization and authority. ‘Rodi’ impatiently awaits the emergence of the evidence that will link Lord Levy and his financial dealings to Freedland, the ideological scribbler for the ‘lobby’.

‘Ancientpistol’ pops up at 0435: ‘I’m with Rodi on this’. ‘ForeverPalestine’ adds his or her analysis:

Britains Jewish community, when they arent peddling open prejudice against Muslims or supporting zionist facism, are apt to see ‘long detected old-fashioned prejudice’ in any comment about someone who happens to be jewish which isnt ars* kissing of the highest order.

‘MayorWatch’ then weighs in with a misreading of Freedland, saying

Sorry Jonathan but it’s all a bit too easy to hurl claims of ‘old-fashioned prejudice’ just because a Nu Labour acolyte is in a spot of bother.

But Freedland isn’t trying to ‘use’ a charge of antisemitism to protect Blair, he is trying to prevent a cloud of antisemitism from helping to rescue Blair. Then more from ‘ForeverPalestine’:

...find an extreme anti-Muslim writer/commentator and they will invariably be either jewish or a strong supporter of Israel.’

And up pops a new character by the name of ‘Enlight’, recommending that we read more about ‘Lord Schmooze’. Enlight has spotted another tentacle underpinning the British war effort:

I would also like to see an investigation into the activities of another Jew, Lord Goldsmith and how he legalised the war on iraq thereby allowing our troops to die for Israel.

‘Ruthe’ also likes conspiracy theory, but a version not linked to Jews (yet). Ruthe believes that the separation of powers between the Metropolitan Police and the Government is nothing but a charade:

I think the dramatic arrest of Lord Levy was the ultimate manipulation to stop the Select Committee starting their investigation again.

But no, conspiracy theory always seems to link to ‘the Jews’ eventually. It only takes ‘Ruthe’ another 12 minutes to come up with this:

I can’t really understand how somebody who is Jewish could be a special envoy for the Middle East. How could he show partiality?

‘Tox06’ re-presents another classic element of antisemitic rhetoric. Those Jews are so touchy, aren’t they?

I really dislike the knee-jerk suggestion that all this is motivated by mere antisemitism.⁵⁰

Nobody suggested that ‘all this’ is motivated by antisemitism , certainly not Freedland. ‘Beslam’ then decides that it is important that we know what Levy’s middle name is: ‘Michael Abraham Levy’, not Lord Levy. ‘Precon’ wants to make something else clear, that those at the heart of the Guinness insider dealing scandal in the 1980s,

weren’t the scapegoats but the leading lights.... Most but not all were Jewish but if you look at Federal Court records for the 1980’s the majority of people caught & prosecuted for this type of Financial crime were Jewish.’

Thirteen minutes later ‘Precon’ comes back with a quote from Tam Dalyell, a believer in the dangerous effects of Jewish advisors around Tony Blair (Brown and Hastings 2003). ‘Downsman’ introduces another ‘corrupt’ rich New Labour Jewish Lord into the discussion, Lord Sainsbury (except, ironically, Lord Sainsbury is not Jewish):

There is a separate conflict issue about his business affairs and his science portfolio, but this has nothing to do with his ethnicity. We need some clear thinking here otherwise the antisemitism label gets easily slapped over all discussions of any prominent person who happens to be jewish.’

⁵⁰ Seymour (2006): ‘Apparently, the biggest criticism being leveled against the Jews is that you cannot criticize the Jews. Or, more exactly, you cannot criticize Israel because in so doing, Jews think that you are criticizing them and, as we all know, you cannot criticize Jews. Of course, not so heavily concealed in this argument is a wealth of antisemitic imagery and assumptions.’

'Enlight' then brings to our attention two more murderers:

What about the Jewish Albright when she said that the death of half a million Iraqi children was a price worth paying (sanctions on Iraq). As for the mass murderer Kissinger...

'Antiscensorship':

I suppose Jonathan Freedland is also Jewish... Spare me your pathetic attempts at sarcasm. its just a matter of public record that organized Jewry are extremely influential in banking, the law, media and in politics. This is not a matter for debate its a demonstrable fact. Your lame attempts at playing the anti semitism card will fail. Its always the way with Zionists. They attempt to play the anto semitism card like an old man who forgets he has told the same war story a thousand times already.

What can be said about this collection of text? This is a collection of edited highlights of comments from people with different ideas and making different points. Not all are antisemitic and not all are making the same points. I am interested in the shape of the swirling discussion as a whole, not in making a case against any particular commenter. I am interested particularly in the character of a swirl which is created by the mixing of entrenched anti-Zionist commonsense with a little open antisemitism.

One point is interesting in relation to the Levy story in particular. This is perfect material for an allegation of 'classic' or 'old' (or 'real') antisemitism. It is a story of somebody who in his public persona is thought of as a nouveau-riche and tasteless Jew, (with the title 'Lord'!) who is accused of playing the middleman for the powerful, selling off peerages. It is fascinating, then, that many of the commenters used the language and the images of the 'new antisemitism' – even though the story has nothing to do with criticisms of Israel or of Zionism. Nowadays, even the gauche tasteless middleman Jew apparently caught with his hand in the till is denounced as a 'Zionist'. After a long and detailed police investigation, no charges were, in fact, brought against the entirely innocent Levy – or against anybody else.

It seems reasonable to assume that most of these commenters think of themselves as being liberal or on the left, whatever that might mean to them. The comments thread is a *Guardian* space, not a fascist BNP space or a jihadi Islamist space or a right-wing conservative *Daily Telegraph* space.

Nearly all of the antisemitic commenters misread Jonathan Freedland's piece. Jonathan Freedland has, as anyone who reads *The Guardian* knows, a long record of opposing the policies of Israeli governments towards the Palestinians as well as the policies of George Bush and Tony Blair regarding the war in Iraq. It is difficult to escape the conclusion that some of the commenters got this wrong because they believed that Freedland was ethnically, rather than politically, neocon.

Without knowledge of who these commenters are it is difficult to know what kind of strands of opinion this represents. And so we are faced simply with text, which represents nothing but itself and which was to be found all over the most important and influential left/liberal webspace in the UK in 2006.⁵¹

Much of the worrying material is material about whose legitimacy there is no consensus. Some observers will understand talk, for example, about 'Zionist' influence of Hollywood and the news agenda, about 'Zionist' responsibility for starting the Iraq war, about the relationship between 'Zionism' and Nazism, as being a legitimate side of a legitimate debate. Others will argue that it is precisely these kinds of positions, which use respectable terminology but which propagate antisemitic notions, which are the most threatening to the health public discourse. At any rate, these are the kinds of ideas which cannot be simply deleted by the editors because there is no broad agreement amongst *Guardian* readers as to their illegitimacy.

When a Jew who does not identify as an anti-Zionist writes a piece on *Comment is Free*, on any topic, they tend to attract comments challenging them to denounce Israeli human rights abuses. This mirrors the test that many leftist Jews have experienced in wider left and liberal circles. What's your position on Israel? Jews are not considered acceptable in

⁵¹ There is scope for further qualitative and quantitative investigation of *Comment Is Free*, its blogs and its commenters. It would be interesting to know whether the bigotry that appears against women and feminist writers was of equal intensity and volume to the bigotry against Jewish and 'Zionist' writers, and against Muslim writers and against Palestinian writers and supporters of Palestinian rights, and against gay and lesbian writers.

some sections of the left and the labour movement until they have answered this question to the satisfaction of the anti-Zionists.⁵²

When Nick Cohen (who is actually significantly less Jewish than his name) writes on any topic, his piece is littered by comments such as this:

I've noticed you avoid commenting on international issues when the situation presents difficulties for your point of view. Well, Cohen, will you condemn Israel, or are you completely morally bankrupt?

Here is a comment from Nick Cohen's column on the week that I happen to be writing this passage, in which he defends Salman Rushdie. 'JusticeIsMine' writes:

'Cohen just can't help yourself can you? The first chance to attack Muslims, you are there like a randy terrier trying to hump our leg. This is all about ISRAEL isn't it Nick? I bet you can't wait for the next terrorist event so you and your mates can start ranting and raving again. Don't worry I'm sure the CIA and Mossad will come up with lots for you to rail against over the next year, in time for the US election.' (Cohen 2007)⁵³

When Norman Geras writes on cricket (2006) he is denounced for not having written about Israeli brutality.⁵⁴ And whenever Maureen Lipman wrote anything in the summer of 2006, she was denounced as a racist. When she wrote a piece about buying a white dress, someone responded, 'Given her views I'm surprised she didn't have a spare brown shirt to put on.' (Lipman 2006)⁵⁵ When she writes about dogs (Lipman 2006a)⁵⁶, someone responds, 'Maureen's 'conscience' is concerned about dogs, but is perfectly clear when it comes to those of the 'wrong' race.' When she writes about showbiz,

⁵² The Natfhe conference of 2006 tried to apply this test to Israeli scholars as a condition of being accepted as part of the academic community.

The international trade union website, LabourStart was denounced by Sue Blackwell as not being a genuine part of the labour movement because it contained 'Zionists'. Sue Blackwell (2005b): 'I thought this was a bona-fide trade union website supporting workers' struggles. However, it emerges that Eric Lee, who runs the site, is a supporter of the 'Engage' anti-boycott site. Until a few years ago he actually ran Labourstart from Israel and even had a link to the IDF homepage!'

⁵³ The Cif editorial staff have since removed this comment but have left references to it by other commenters (6 November 2007)

⁵⁴ The Cif editorial staff have since removed a number of these comments.

⁵⁵ The Cif editorial staff have since removed this comment.

⁵⁶ The Cif editorial staff have since removed this comment.

someone comments ‘It’s amazing that all the chaos, suffering and violence in the Middle East seems to have gone unnoticed by Maureen.’

This abuse followed an accusation that was made against Lipman, that she made a racist comment. She was having a discussion on a TV current affairs programme with Michael Portillo, Diane Abbott and Andrew Neil at the time of the beginning of the Israel-Hezbollah war of the summer of 2006. Portillo was talking about the fact that Hezbollah and Hamas are jihadi Islamist organizations of the same kind that were responsible for suicide bombing around the world. Abbott then raised the question of proportionality, arguing that the Israeli response to the attack on its soldiers could be seen as being disproportional. Maureen Lipman replied,

What’s proportion got to do with it, though, Diane? It’s not about proportion, is it? I mean human life is not cheap to the Israelis, and human life on the other side is quite cheap...

It appears from the context of the discussion that by ‘the other side’ Lipman meant Hezbollah, Hamas, and the other jihadi Islamist organizations. CAABU, the *Council for the Advancement of Arab-British Understanding* complained to the BBC that this was a racist comment, because it understood Lipman to have meant that ‘Arabs, whether Palestinians or Lebanese, do not value human life as much as anyone else’. (CAABU 2006)

Lipman had gone on to clarify what she meant: ‘... and human life on the other side is quite cheap because they strap bombs to people and send them to blow themselves up’. She seems to have been arguing that Israelis value life more than those who ‘strap bombs to people and send them to blow themselves up’ - that is, the jihadi Islamist terrorist organizations. It is they who send out suicide bombers, not Arabs, Palestinians, Lebanese or Muslims in general.

Whether Lipman was right or wrong to claim that Israelis value human life more than jihadi Islamists is a question that might be discussed. But it seems clear that while one may agree or disagree, it is a misreading to claim that it is a racist comment.

(ii) Antisemitic themes mirrored in anti-Zionist text

In section i, I looked at the Ken Livingstone's claim that he is accused of antisemitism only because he criticizes Israel, and I looked at what appears to be a proliferation and normalization of anti-Zionist and antisemitic bigotry on *The Guardian* website. Both of these seem to represent a mainstreaming of the most demonizing anti-Zionist discourses combined with a denial that there was a problem; indeed more than a denial; a counter-allegation against those who suggested that antisemitic ways of thinking were detectable coming from left and liberal sources. Section ii presents more examples of Lerman's 'intensified criticism', more examples of the mainstreaming of absolute anti-Zionism and of antisemitism, and examples which mirror the themes and rhetoric of older anti-Jewish movements. Two themes which re-occur in discourses that demonize Jews, over the centuries, and across the globe, are the blood libel and the charge of Jewish conspiracy. Section ii of Part II analyzes case studies of anti-Zionist text and discourse which mirror themes from (a) blood libel and (b) conspiracy theory.

(a) Blood Libel

Image 1 (see bibliography for a list of numbered images) shows a wholesome Jaffa orange, cut in half, out of which blood is dripping. The Slogan reads: 'Boycott Israeli Goods: Don't squeeze a Jaffa, crush the occupation'. The combination of Jews, food and non-Jewish blood creates a graphic, emotive and powerful image. If you eat the Jaffa oranges that the 'Zionists' are trying to sell you, you will metaphorically be drinking the blood of their victims.

How does such an image get produced? There are three possible kinds of explanations. The first is that the similarity with the old themes is purely coincidental. If this is the case, such coincidences seem to happen often. The second possible explanation for the 'blood orange' image is that the designer of the poster is an antisemite who is consciously drawing on antisemitic tradition. This is unlikely and is of course strenuously denied. Antiracist anti-Zionists who campaign for a boycott of Israel say quite clearly that they are not antisemites. They do not appear to be conscious Jew-haters and they are not knowingly drawing on older antisemitic themes.

The third possible kind of explanation is that there is some sense in which antisemitic themes are deeply embedded in the culture, and elements present themselves unconsciously to people looking for emotive images which can drive us to act against Israel. The mechanism of this cultural unconscious, how and why it works, how and why it is so often repeated, is one element of the relationship between hostility to Israel and antisemitism which requires further research and rigorous thinking-through. But many anti-Zionists are not prepared to think it through. Frequently the response to the observation that some of their imagery mirrors old antisemitic themes is disdainful denial followed by a counter-allegation of bad faith.

Ariel Sharon was caricatured eating a baby in *The Independent* newspaper, 27 January 2003 (*Image 2*). Dave Brown, the cartoonist, won the ‘political cartoon of the year award’ for this image. Perhaps this image of a corrupt, violent and bullying Jew eating an innocent child is only coincidentally analogous to classic blood libel imagery. ‘Brown insisted he had never intended this meaning and that his cartoon was inspired by the Goya painting Saturn Devouring one of His Children.’ (Byrne 2003)

Norman Finkelstein hosts an extensive gallery of cartoons on his website by the Brazilian artist ‘Latuff’.⁵⁷ Latuff won second prize in Mahmoud Ahmadinejad’s Tehran competition for cartoons which illustrate Holocaust denial. This, incidentally, is a clear example of the ways in which elements of rhetoric circulate around the different anti-Zionist movements. Norman Finkelstein, who considers himself to be an antiracist and a scholar, hosts Latuff, who in turn is happy to compete in Ahmadinejad’s Holocaust denial art festival. One image (*Image 3*) shows a swimming pool, the shape of the Gaza strip, filled with blood. The image shows Uncle Sam luxuriating in the blood, Ehud Olmert covered in the blood and using an Israeli flag as a towel, and a UN waiter bringing a drink of blood to the two swimmers. The world is pictured sitting in the sun, refusing to be concerned. There are a number of other images by Latuff, hosted by Finkelstein, which mirror themes of the blood libel. There is one which shows an innocent child who is either Lebanese, or who represents Lebanon itself, being doused in Israeli petrol

⁵⁷ <http://www.normanfinkelstein.com/article.php?pg=11&ar=176>, downloaded 19 June 2007

(gasoline). Another shows an Israeli soldier washing the blood off his hands using an American tap. Another image shows Ariel Sharon with vampire fangs.

Sue Blackwell (2005), while campaigning for the exclusion of academics who work in Israel from British campuses, wrote that the ‘sins of Bar-Ilan University and other Israeli universities are certainly as red as blood’. On being challenged about this image, she responded (2005b) with a piece entitled ‘Bloody Ridiculous’, writing ‘OK chaps, I know you are desperate to pin the ‘anti-semitic’ label on me but just how low can you sink? Just carry on, you’re doing a good job of digging yourselves deeper’.

The theme of Israel as a child-killing state is increasingly common. Any incident of an under-age Palestinian being killed during the conflict is liable to be understood and presented as a manifestation of Israel’s essentially child-killing nature. The slippage from particular incidents to a generalized commonsense notion is a common characteristic of much anti-Zionist discourse. The particular truth is often essentialized as the necessary truth.

Blood libel always goes hand in hand with antisemitic conspiracy theory. If ‘the Jews’ kill children then certainly they conspire to hide the crime (Julius 2006). If Israel is based on child-killing and genocide, then certainly there must be a Zionist conspiracy or an Israel Lobby which has the power to keep the fact out of the global media.

The most explicit and complete version of antisemitic conspiracy theory is the ‘Protocols of the Elders of Zion’, a late 19th century Russian forgery which purported to constitute a report of a meeting of the Jewish conspiracy in Prague. Contemporary echoes of the old theme of Jewish conspiracy take the form of an argument that there is a Zionist lobby with such huge global influence and power that it is able to send the United States of America to war in its interests and to de-legitimise any narrative of Israel and Palestine which it does not like, as antisemitic. The Protocols and more contemporary charges of Zionist influence come together in the Hamas Covenant (1988), the founding document of the party which won the January 2006 election in Palestine and which has made a successful coup against the Palestinian Presidency in Gaza. The Hamas Covenant

explicitly plagiarizes from, and endorses, the original Protocols forgery and holds ‘the Jews’ responsible for all the revolutions, wars and imperialism of the modern era.

Ilan Pappe (2006) argues that Israeli forces are committing genocide in Gaza. The charge that Israel commits genocide, in Gaza or the West Bank, or in Lebanon, is a charge commonly made by anti-Zionists. At first sight, such a characterization would appear to be entirely counter-productive, since while Israeli forces are regularly responsible for serious human rights abuses, they can easily show themselves to be not guilty of genocide. When there is no genocide in Gaza why do anti-Zionists like Pappe continue to assert that there is? These repeated allegations have the effect of demonizing Israel, of implanting and reinforcing the notion that Israel is a unique evil. It simplifies: Israel is the ‘oppressor’, Palestine is the ‘oppressed’ and anything more complicated only serves to confuse this central issue.

The genocide charge is a particular kind of demonization. Genocide has a particular relevance to Israel, which was created three years after the end of the Holocaust. The contemporary claim that there is a genocide in Gaza is related to the claim that Israel uses the Holocaust instrumentally to justify its violence. The charge that Israel is like Nazi Germany functions to neutralize this alleged instrumentalization of the Holocaust. In order to neutralize the Holocaust in this way, it is necessary to normalize it and to distort its reality.⁵⁸ So anti-Zionists often push a number of myths: (a) what happens in Gaza today is, in some sense, the same as the Holocaust, which is the point of naming it ‘genocide’; (b) ‘Zionists’ collaborated with the Holocaust and so were partly responsible for it;⁵⁹ (c) ‘Zionism’ is ideologically akin to nazism.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ For more on left versions of Holocaust denial, see Rich (2007) and Ezra (2007).

⁵⁹ See Korneyev (1977) for the classic Soviet version: ‘Together with the Nazis, the Zionists bear responsibility for the destruction of Jews in 1941-1945 in Europe. The blood of millions of victims is on their hands and on their conscience.’ Jim Allen’s 1980s ‘Trotskyist’ version has his hero in *Perdition* making the following claims: ‘The simple terrible truth is that the Jews of Hungary were murdered not just by the force of German arms, but by the calculated treachery of their own Jewish leaders’ (p. 156); the Zionists worked ‘hand in glove’ with the Adolf Eichman (p103); it was ‘the Zionist knife in the Nazi fist’ that had murdered the Jews (p. 156). The first remained in the final published version and the second and third were cut. They are taken from the version released by the Royal Court Theatre in 1987. Allen said in an interview that *Perdition* was ‘...the most lethal attack on Zionism ever written, because it touches on the heart of the most abiding myth of modern history, the Holocaust. Because it says quite plainly that privileged Jewish leaders collaborated in the extermination of their own kind in order to bring about a

Pappe (2006) writes: ‘Nothing apart from pressure in the form of sanctions, boycott and divestment will stop the murdering of innocent civilians in the Gaza Strip.’ Perhaps his wish to advocate for this campaign is what has led him to make the over-blown claim of genocide; he does not use the term ‘genocide’ to describe events in 1948, which is his area of historical expertise. Yet his proposed remedy today does not seem to fit the alleged disease. If there was really genocide occurring in Gaza, surely a more urgent, powerful and desperate response would be appropriate than carrying on the long, slow campaign for sanctions, boycott and divestment. Pappe finishes by exhorting the world ‘not to allow the genocide of Gaza to continue’. He precedes this exhortation with the words: ‘in the name of the holocaust memory’. The irony is that so long as Pappe employs this kind of political rhetoric, then it is unlikely indeed that it should communicate successfully with the majority of Israelis and Jews. But perhaps he is not writing for Israelis. Perhaps he has given up on building a peace movement and he has given up on Israelis as potential agents for progressive change: ‘There is nothing we here in Israel can do against [the genocide in Gaza]’, writes Pappe. Shortly after writing this piece, Pappe accepted a job at Exeter University in England.

(b) Conspiracy Theory

Conspiracy theory features in each of the four examples that we have looked at so far; the *Livingstone formulation*,⁶¹ which holds that critics of Israel are silenced by a conspiracy

Zionist state, Israel, a state which is itself racist.’ In 2007, the Scottish Palestine Solidarity Campaign held a reading of Allen’s play and hosted Lenni Brenner, in order to use Holocaust Memorial Day to make their points about the connection between Zionism and Nazism.

⁶⁰ Mazin Qumsiyeh puts it like this on Mona Baker’s website,

<http://www.monabaker.com/conflictfacts2.htm>, in ‘Ten Zionist Obfuscations’: ‘Zionism and Nazism were twins in their narrow nationalism and even collaborated against the public. The Zionists thus found no reason not to collaborate with the Nazis in the mid-thirties to rid Europe of its Jews.’ For an extreme right-wing version of the claim, see Chiappalone (1997): ‘Zionism and Nazism actually have a great deal in common. They are a desire for national identity, national socialism, ‘self-determination’, and ‘freedom’ from those who might be called ‘troublemakers’. In fact, they are both philosophies of imagined racial superiority and purity, which have rationalized all of their actions in the name of some greater ‘good’. And, they each conceal a deeper evil at their core.’

⁶¹ Another example of the use of the *Livingstone formulation*: on the day that David Miliband was made Foreign Secretary, the BBC website ran a profile of him written by Paul Reynolds, World Affairs correspondent: ‘David Miliband’s Jewish background will be noted particularly in the Middle East. Israel will welcome this - but equally it allows him the freedom to criticize Israel, as he has done, without being accused of antisemitism.’ (Reynolds 2007) The clear assumption here is that anyone who criticizes Israel should be afraid of being denounced as an antisemite and that that there is a hugely powerful ‘Zionist’

to make mendacious accusations of antisemitism; Livingstone's view that the Board of Deputies is capable of fixing a desired result from a public investigation; the routinization of conspiracy theory on *Cif*; conspiracy theory as the necessary twin of blood libel.

In March 2006, John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt published a paper in two different forms. 'The Israel Lobby' (2006a) was published in the London Review of Books and 'The Israel lobby and US foreign policy' (2006b) was published as a Faculty Research Working Paper by Harvard University and the Kennedy School of Government. I do not offer here a detailed critique of the text of the paper, a straightforward task which was carried out more or less satisfactorily within a few weeks of its publication (Morris 2006; Herf & Markovits 2006; Dershowitz 2006)⁶². Rather I am interested in the way that the paper provided a language for the discussion of 'Zionist' conspiracy and in the way in which this language was enthusiastically, quickly and widely adopted by many who found it natural to think within this framework.

Robert Fine (2006a) uses the concept of 'slippage' to examine the problem. The paper itself starts with something real and it asks answerable questions. What is the nature and influence of various lobbying and campaigning organisations which relate to Israel and Jews in the USA, such as AIPAC (American Israel Public Affairs Committee), the ADL (Anti Defamation League), AJC (American Jewish Committee)? How do these different organisations operate, what do they want, and what effect do they have? But even within the Mearsheimer and Walt paper itself, the focus on particular and differing organisations, and concrete questions, begins to slip into a conception of 'the lobby' which is discussed as though it was a hugely powerful, coherent, covert and therefore conspiratorial political agent. The particular claim made by Mearsheimer and Walt, which shows that they were discussing an extremely powerful and threatening world-

'lobby' which is capable of intimidating a senior government minister into muting his legitimate criticism of Israel. When challenged, reports a commenter on Engage, who had received a reply from Reynolds to his complaint to the BBC, Reynolds referred to a piece by Anthony Julius and Alan Dershowitz (2007) which argued that the academic boycott of Israel was antisemitic, as an example. Reynolds thereby relies on the claim that 'criticism' is the same as a proposal to exclude Israeli academics from campuses, journals and conferences.

⁶² More references are to be found on the Engage website, <http://www.engageonline.org.uk/archives/index.php?id=17>, collated by Jeff Weintraub.

straddling agent, is that the ‘Israel Lobby’ was held to be responsible for ensuring that the USA went to war against the Saddam regime in Iraq. Robert Fine (2006a) writes:

Their argument runs along the classic lines of conspiracy theory. There is the initial explanandum: the ‘unwavering’ material, diplomatic and military support the US grants to a foreign country, Israel. Two possible explanations for this policy are considered and rejected: one is the foreign country’s strategic value to the US; the other is compelling moral imperatives to support this country’s existence

Disposal of these two explanations paves the way for the Only True Explanation which explains why the US has been willing to sacrifice its own security to the interests of another state. It is the Lobby. They characterize it as the *de facto* agent for a foreign government. They maintain it makes Israel virtually immune to criticism in Washington. They say it quashes debate in the public sphere through the power of its money, its control of the media, its policing of academia and not least its exploitation of the charge of antisemitism against anyone who criticizes Israel’s actions or the Lobby’s own influence. They argue that, thanks to the Lobby, the US has come into line with Israeli positions rather than Israel come into line with US interests. The lobby, we are told, took on the President of the United States and triumphed. Sharon wrapped Bush ‘round his little finger’. The demonic tail is wagging the gullible dog.

Finally, this explanation is extended to explain all manner of other phenomena beyond the initial explanandum. The Lobby, we are told, was the critical factor behind the US decision to impose sanctions on Iran and Libya, to go war on Iraq and overthrow Saddam, and now to take on Israel’s other enemies such as Syria and Iran. While the US does the fighting, dying and paying, they write, Israel is the beneficiary. The Lobby’s influence increases the danger of terrorism, fuels Islamic radicalism, raises the spectre of further wars in Syria and Iran, makes impossible any resolution of Palestinian suffering, undercuts US prestige abroad and its efforts to limit nuclear proliferation, and erodes democracy within the US. All for Israel. What is needed is ‘candid discussion of the Lobby’s influence’, a return to reality and the advancement once more of US interests.

Slippage from criticism of American foreign policy to wild eyed conspiracy theory punctuates this whole narrative.

At a public event organised by the London Review of Books in New York, John Mearsheimer said: ‘The Israel lobby was one of the principal driving forces behind the Iraq War, and in its absence we probably would not have had a war.’ (Stoll 2006) The accusation that a Jewish conspiracy pushes the world into unnecessary wars in the interest of the Jews is an old staple of antisemitic conspiracy theory. For example Claire Hirshfield (1980) tells how some who opposed the Boer war blamed it on a Jewish diamond lobby manipulating the British empire:

If it could be demonstrated that the ... government had been tricked into war by the machinations of shady Jewish capitalists and that the public had been intentionally misled by omnipotent Jewish presslords, then sufficient pressure might indeed be generated to end what its opponents considered an immoral war. That the pursuit of this worthy aim involved an appeal to a base and discreditable prejudice seems to have little troubled the various socialists, radicals and labourites

who utilized the shorthand of ‘Jewish finance’ as a convenient means of epitomizing the dark underside of British imperialism.’

Charles Lindbergh (1941) blamed un-patriotic Jewish power for trying to draw the USA into World War II against its own interests:

I am not attacking either the Jewish or the British people. Both races, I admire. But I am saying that the leaders of both ... for reasons which are as understandable from their viewpoint as they are inadvisable from ours, for reasons which are not American, wish to involve us in the war.

Interestingly Lindbergh also makes use of an early variant of the *Livingstone formulation* in the same speech:

The terms ‘fifth columnist,’ ‘traitor,’ ‘Nazi,’ ‘anti-Semitic’ were thrown ceaselessly at any one who dared to suggest that it was not to the best interests of the United States to enter the war.

Conspiracy theories have been circulating on the internet ever since 11 September 2001, trying to blame 9/11 on ‘Zionists’, claiming that the Jews in the World Trade Centre were warned not to go to show up that day, claiming that Israeli agents had been seen celebrating in New Jersey as the twin towers collapsed. The Hamas Covenant (1988) explicitly blames Jews for every war and upheaval since the French and Russian revolutions. In a notorious speech to the Reichstag, Adolf Hitler held the Jews responsible for the First World War:

In case the Jewish financiers... succeed once more in hurling the peoples into a world war, the result will be... the annihilation of the Jewish race in Europe.⁶³

Other Claims which were made within the Mearsheimer and Walt paper which slipped into more explicit and less nuanced ones in a more political forum. Mearsheimer claimed that terrorist ‘animus’ against America was the result of US policy towards Israel, which itself is a result of the machinations of the ‘lobby’. He added, employing his version of the *Livingstone formulation*, that this ‘simply can’t be discussed in the mainstream media.’ (Stoll 2006)

The tendency for this kind of slippage to occur accelerated outside of the hands of the authors themselves, and manifested itself in the uses people made of the paper. Anybody who wanted to talk about Jewish or Zionist power now had a Harvard and Kennedy School stamp of respectability with which they could inoculate their own ideas against

⁶³ Adolf Hitler’s announcement to the Reichstag in 1939 <http://www.nizkor.org/hweb/people/g/goebbelss-joseph/goebbels-1948-excerpts-02.html>

the spurious and disingenuous charges of antisemitism which would be sure to follow. The idea of disproportionate and dangerous Jewish power, and particularly its covert application in steering states towards war, was not new; but Mearsheimer and Walt offered a legitimate vocabulary with which to make these kinds of claims. And the offer was taken up enthusiastically by many people in the summer of the Israel-Hizbollah war which followed the publication of the ‘Lobby’ paper.

Philip Roth was one of the first to sense the paranoid zeitgeist that was on its way, under the surface of public discourse, in the first decade of the twenty-first century. ‘The Plot against America’ (2005) was his counter-factual story of what might have happened in America during the early 1940s if Charles Lindbergh, an antisemite and campaigner to keep the USA out of the war, had been elected President. It is a picture of a seemingly entirely normal world under the surface of which lies the menacing narrative of antisemitic conspiracy theory which holds Jews responsible for trying to drag America into World War Two. The central characters in the novel feel the menace, while many others regard them as paranoid, backward-looking, tied to outdated notions of Jewish identity, and unpatriotic.

Conspiracy theory in Britain existed Before Mearsheimer and Walt. For example, in May 2003, respected Labour MP Tam Dalyell accused the Prime Minister Tony Blair of ‘being unduly influenced by a cabal of Jewish advisers’ (Brown & Hastings 2003).⁶⁴ Paul Foot (2003), well known journalist and leading member of the Socialist Workers Party leapt to Dalyell’s defence: ‘obviously he is wrong to complain about Jewish pressure on Blair and Bush when he means Zionist pressure’. Foot knew how to interpret an antisemitic statement as an anti-Zionist one. But after Mearsheimer and Walt came along, everybody knew how to do it and the specific terminology of the ‘Lobby’ became ubiquitous in anti-Zionist discourse.

The theoretical journal of the supposedly antiracist Socialist Workers Party, *Socialist Review*, now writes things like this, about the 2007 UCU decision to back the boycott campaign:

⁶⁴ Dalyell had then employed the *Livingstone formulation*: ‘The trouble is that anyone who dares criticize the Zionist operation is immediately labelled anti-Semitic...’ (Marsden 2003)

A very powerful pro-Israel lobby has gone to work to denounce these decisions with the support of the pro-war “left”. Meanwhile arch Zionist and Harvard lawyer Alan Dershowitz has threatened to “devastate and bankrupt” any organisation which commits to a boycott of Israel. These figures want to block discussion of Israel’s actions. We must defend the right of trade unions to democratically pass resolutions and hold political debates without being subjected to such threats. (Harman 2007)

A whole number of elements of conspiracy theory are here packed into one seemingly innocent paragraph. Firstly the use of the term ‘pro-Israel lobby’ as a single unvariegated and therefore dishonest conspiracy; secondly its designation as ‘very powerful’; thirdly the lobby’s association with the ‘pro-war’ (pseudo) ““left””, an allegation of the further dishonesty of pretending to be “left”, while not really being left, and an association of the ‘pro-Israel lobby’ with support for war; Alan Dershowitz, a name universally recognized by decent people to connote pure evil or ‘arch’ Zionism; Dershowitz’s threat to ‘devastate and bankrupt’ resonates with the menace and power of ‘the lobby’; ‘these figures’, Dershowitz the arch-Zionist, the Harvard lawyer, the pro-war pseudo left, the pro-Israel lobby, the sum of all that is bad in the struggle against imperialism, want to block discussion of Israel’s actions – a remarkable allegation, given that it is the boycotters who insist on discussing not ‘Israel’s actions’ but instead the plan to exclude Israelis from British public life; next there is a substitution of the right to have debates for the right to support the exclusion of Israelis; then the right for trade unions to be free from criticism; then ‘such threats’, referring to one rather idle threat made by Alan Dershowitz is constructed as being something from which we must defend ourselves against the powerful, dishonest, pro-war, pseudo left, lobby. Even after the elements which go to make up a paragraph like this are explained in detail, some people will look blankly and say, ‘it all seems perfectly innocent to me’.

Richard Ingrams (2007), a columnist in *The Independent* newspaper, reviewed the book version of the Mearsheimer and Walt thesis when it was published in Britain in September 2007. Ingrams could not resist the temptation to make explicit that in his reading of the Lobby thesis, it was covert Jewish influence and not only ‘pro-Israel’ lobbying which was decisive in sending the only superpower to war, not in its own interest, but in the interests of a foreign power:

[Mearsheimer and Walt] demonstrate that the American invasion ... not only had the support of Israel but also that the overriding aim of those (mostly Jewish) neocons who were urging Bush to invade was to assist Israel...

Whereas Mearsheimer and Walt have repeatedly denied that their thesis has anything to do with Jews, arguing that many Jews do not support ‘the lobby’ and that many constituents of ‘the lobby’ are not Jewish, Ingrams interprets their book for a wider public in precisely the way that opponents of antisemitism had feared and predicted that it would be read and understood. In 2003 Ingrams (2003) wrote in *The Observer* newspaper that he had developed a practice when ‘confronted by letters to the editor in support of the Israeli government to look at the signature to see if the writer has a Jewish name.’ If so, he says, he tends not to read it. Ingrams, then, had a pre-existing opinion that British Jews had nothing of interest to say about Israel since their views would be explicable only by reference to their ethnicity and not to their experience, knowledge or judgment; the *ad hominem* argument *par excellence*. Inevitably, Richard Ingrams (2005) also makes use of the *Livingstone formulation*: ‘The board [of deputies of British Jews] ...thinks nothing of branding journalists as racists and anti-semites if they write disrespectfully of Mr Sharon....’ Some may find that blaming Jews for the war in Iraq and finding it appropriate to leave letters to the editor written by people with Jewish sounding names unread, are not precisely the same kinds of things as writing disrespectfully of Ariel Sharon. It is routine now that any accusation of antisemitism is responded to by demanding freedom of speech for criticism of Israel. Ingrams’ writing exemplifies the process of slippage to which the Mearsheimer and Walt thesis lends itself. It again raises uncomfortable questions about the notion of political responsibility with which Mearsheimer and Walt operate. We should also note that it has become common and apparently normal for mainstream liberal ‘antiracist’ newspapers like *The Independent*, *The Observer* and *The Guardian* to give space to people like Richard Ingrams to opine on ‘The Jewish Question’.

Another outrider for Mearsheimer and Walt is Anatol Lieven. The flagship morning radio news show of the BBC, *The Today Programme*, carried a report by its Washington correspondent, Justin Webb which gave publicity to the Mearsheimer and Walt book on 10 October 2007. Webb said:

Anatol Lieven of King's College, London, who worked recently in Washington was accused of antisemitism for doing little more, he says, than suggesting that America should put pressure on Israel to close the settlements.

[Lieven's voice:] 'This accusation of antisemitism has no basis in evidence or rationality. It's not the kind of accusation which in any other circumstances would even be allowed to be printed. It is simply being used as a way of trying to terrify, to frighten, critics of Israel and of American support for Israel into silence.' (Hirsh 2007a)

Webb accepts Lieven's account of what has happened but he slips in the scare-phrases. '*Little more ... than*', what, exactly, more? '*He says*', but is it true? Did Webb check? Or did Webb simply accept the claim? '*Suggesting*'? Did he really respectfully 'suggest'? But Webb doesn't know because he evidently did not check.

There may be people in the US who would make an accusation of antisemitism against somebody simply for arguing for the dismantling the settlements. But here the apparent behaviour of one supporter of the settlements is held to illustrate the behaviour of the whole 'lobby'. So Lieven claims: 'This accusation of antisemitism has no basis in evidence or rationality.' He is not referring to this particular accusation but is now talking generally about the 'accusation of antisemitism'. The discourse has slipped from a particular but undefined and uncorroborated incident to a general claim. Leiven now claims: 'It's not the kind of accusation which in any other circumstances would even be allowed to be printed.' Moving into the passive, he doesn't specify *who* would normally disallow a charge of racism. But it is understood that he thinks that it is the 'lobby' which is in a position to legislate an exception to this rule: 'It is simply being used as a way of trying to terrify, to frighten, critics of Israel and of American support for Israel into silence.' So now we learn that such an accusation is not made in good faith; it is not a mistake. We learn now that such an accusation is part of a common plan and a secret plan. The verb *trying* could not signify anything other than a concerted planned attempt to do something. To 'frighten'. To frighten 'critics of Israel' into silence.

Later in the same report we hear the following [beginning with the voice of Ralph Nader]:

'The Israeli puppeteer travels to Washington, the Israeli puppeteer meets with the puppet in the White House and then moves down Pennsylvania Avenue and meets with the puppets in Congress and then takes back billions of taxpayer dollars.'

[Back to the voice of Justin Webb:] Ralph Nader is a consumer rights advocate who has run for the Presidency and makes the case against the Israel lobby with great gusto and in a manner that many Jewish Americans find deeply offensive. Mearsheimer and Walt also make the case that the Israel lobby is overly powerful but again, John Mearsheimer's language is careful and his point nuanced:

[The voice of John Mearsheimer:] ‘We’re not making the argument that this is a cabal or conspiracy. The American political system, as you know, has interest groups at its heart and interest group politics is what life is like in the American political system. And the Israel lobby is just like the National Rifle Association, the farm lobby, the American Association of Retired People and other lobbies. Small numbers of people who are deeply committed to a particular policy and are smart and energetic can influence policies in ways that are out of sync with what most people in the United States want.’

Nader articulates conspiracy theory using the traditional antisemitic vocabulary of the ‘puppeteer’. Webb describes this as making the ‘case against the Israel lobby’ with ‘great gusto’. Webb tells us that Nader does it in a manner that many ‘Jewish Americans find deeply offensive’ but he does not explain why. He does not tell us whether the listeners, ordinary people who aren’t Jewish or American, should be offended. He doesn’t tell us why this might be offensive. The politics of racism are reduced to the politics of trying not to give offence. Webb is operating with a notion that only Jews should be, or are, concerned about Nader’s conspiracy theory. And then Webb goes on to say that Mearsheimer makes the same case as Nader - but that his ‘language is careful and his point nuanced’. Webb has, perhaps, stumbled onto the exact truth here, but he seems not to understand the importance of the word ‘also’ in the sentence, ‘Mearsheimer and Walt *also* make the case that the Israel lobby is overly powerful but again, John Mearsheimer’s language is careful and his point nuanced....’ The case is the same, it is heard as the same and it is used as authority for the same, but it is done more carefully and in a nuanced way. So we have a claim that Mearsheimer articulates careful and a nuanced version of the “Jew as puppet” narrative. And because it is ‘careful’ and ‘nuanced’ then it is given airspace on BBC Radio 4.

Stephen Rose’s use of ‘The Lobby’ rhetoric

When Steven Rose, a leading proponent of the campaign for an academic boycott of Israel, appeared on Radio 4’s Today programme (Hirsh 2006f) to comment on the report of the parliamentary inquiry into antisemitism (2006), he relied heavily on the concept of the ‘lobby’. Rose admitted that there had been a rise in antisemitism but he argued that

this was primarily the result of the criminal actions of Israel in Palestine. The interviewer responded:

Interviewer But that is Israel, that is the country, the government of Israel, it's not Jewish people.

Rose That is precisely the point but the problem is always that the Israel Lobby insists that Judaism and Zionism, Judaism and support of Israel, are identical and while they go on insisting that, and while they go on attacking those of us who actually oppose the policies of Israel as being antisemitic or being, in my case, a self-hating Jew, then they actually build this rod for their own backs... (Hirsh 2006f)

Rose introduces the term ‘Israel Lobby’ and he claims that it is responsible for this false identity between Judaism and ‘Zionism’ (Rose translates ‘Zionism’ as ‘support for Israel’). Here, Rose is broadening out the claim that antisemitism is the fault of Israel, into a claim that it is the fault of a global ‘Israel lobby’. Immediately he conflates the multiplicity of campaigns and individuals who oppose his anti-Zionism and his boycotts into one shadowy and undefined term. The ‘lobby’, argues Rose, insists on this identity between ‘Zionism’ and Jews and it attacks those who ‘oppose the policies of Israel’ as being antisemitic or self-haters. So another shift: now it is not Rose’s demonization and his boycotts that the ‘lobby’ wants to suppress with its trumped up charge of antisemitism, but it is actually criticism of Israeli policies.

Rose himself conflates ‘Israel lobby’ with ‘Jews’ by arguing that ‘they’ build a rod for thier own backs. The ‘Lobby’ builds the rod but it is Jews in general (‘their own backs’) that get hit by it. So the ‘lobby’ has already become, in the way that Rose uses the term, a code-word for of Jews in general. Rose does not think it important to discuss who is doing the hitting with this rod that ‘the lobby’ has built for ‘their own backs’. He is not interested in the responsibility of antisemites for antisemitism, or in the responsibility of Jews and antiracists to oppose and confront the antisemites. Rose goes on:

We’ve received death threats for actually daring to discuss the idea of a boycott of a racist university system within Israel itself. And so in fact the rise in antisemitism is precisely because this equation of being Israeli and being Jewish. We don’t say that but the Israelis do.

Rose is clearly implying here that it is ‘the Israel Lobby’ that sends out death threats to him and his colleagues. And he is right. Because his understanding of the term ‘lobby’ includes everyone from AIPAC, the ADL, the AJC, Campus Watch, Melanie Phillips, to

the UJS, the Board of Deputies, the All-party Parliamentary Committee, to Engage, Workers' Liberty, Jonathan Freedland, David Aaronovitch, Meretz USA - to loony late night green-ink letter-writers who send death threats. All those who stand against Rose's characterization of Israel as apartheid and illegitimate speak, in his imagination, with one voice, say one thing, adopt one tactic, have one politics. In other words, the 'lobby', in the way that Rose uses the term, is a global Jewish conspiracy. Nearly all newspapers, TV stations, websites, publishing houses, Hollywood itself, oppose his focus on Israel as a uniquely racist centre of global imperialism. And Rose can not just be wrong; the fact that most people disagree with him needs to be explained; and it is explained with reference to the existence of a vast conspiracy.

Robert Fisk, the United States of Israel, and 'the lobby'

The Independent newspaper on 27 April 2006 carried a four-page piece by Robert Fisk (2006) headlined 'United States of Israel?' It was illustrated by a full-page, full-colour image of the Stars and Stripes with Stars of David replacing the usual stars (*Image 4*). The piece profiles Stephen Walt as a hero who bravely stood up to the 'Lobby' and its malicious and dishonest accusations of antisemitism.

The image used by *The Independent* of the Jewish Stars and Stripes says that Jews control America; these are Jewish symbols, not Israeli symbols. The premise is that Jews are not patriotic Americans; Jews care more for their own narrow community than the wider national or human community. The same device of merging Jewish stars with the American flag has long been used by neo-Nazis, conspiracy theorists and Jihadi Islamists.⁶⁵

The Fisk article offers no evidence to back up the strong version of the thesis, the one that is illustrated by the flag, and there is little evidence to back up a weaker or more sophisticated version, that the 'Zionists' tricked or coerced the US to spill the blood of its citizens in a war that was against its own interests. There is some overblown rhetoric about AIPAC, 'the agent of a foreign government [that] has a stranglehold on Congress -

⁶⁵ Examples of antisemitic versions of the 'Stars of David & Stripes' can be found here: <http://www.engageonline.org.uk/blog/article.php?id=653> (downloaded 25 July 2007).

so much so that US policy towards Israel is not debated there'.⁶⁶ Fisk tells us that 'the lobby' monitors and condemns academics who are critical of Israel. Fisk repeats Mearsheimer and Walt's version of the *Livingstone formulation* (quoted from Mearsheimer & Walt 2006b), that '[a]nyone who criticizes Israel's actions or argues that pro-Israel groups have significant influence over US Middle East policy ... stands a good chance of being labelled an anti-semitic'.

Fisk does not give an example of anyone claiming that Mearsheimer and Walt are antisemites or are motivated by antisemitism. He quotes Alan Dershowitz as saying that 'the two scholars recycled accusations that "would be seized on by bigots to promote their antisemitic agendas"'. Fisk claims that Noam Chomsky is prevented by 'the Lobby' from having a column in an American newspaper. He asserts that 'the Lobby' prevented a repeated showing of a film that Fisk had made for Channel 4. He writes that an 'Israel support group' (unnamed, although apparently part of 'the lobby') insulted Fisk. He says that 'the lobby' prevented the showing of 'I am Rachel Corrie' in New York. 'The lobby' is presented as an un-opposable unstoppable force. It tells Presidents and members of Congress what to do and what to say. Its tentacles reach into theatres, TV stations and newspapers. Americans would like to resist but are forced to act against their own interest by the 'lobby'. In the 1950s the conspiracy theorists insisted that 'the Communists' controlled America; now 'the Lobby' has replaced 'the communists' as the hidden puppet master. Seymour (2007) argues that it is not a coincidence that there is a marked decline in UFO sightings which coincides with a marked increase in more 'realistic' conspiracy theories.

Fisk claims that the US changed its policy towards Israel after 1967 'in response to lobbying by the American-Jewish community'. He does not consider the alternative possible explanation that Americans were concerned that Israel might be militarily defeated, and that this might not be a good thing. Neither does he consider an explanation in terms of US interest in the context of the Cold War. Events, politics,

⁶⁶ Compare with this, from Charles Lindbergh, speaking against proposed US entry into the Second World War: 'As I have said, these war agitators comprise only a small minority of our people; but they control a tremendous influence. Against the determination of the American people to stay out of war, they have marshaled the power of their propaganda, their money, their patronage.' (Lindbergh 1941)

campaigns and disagreements are presented in the world-view of the conspiracy theorist as being controlled by the vice-like grip of ‘the Jews’ (in some versions, the ‘Zionists’ or the ‘Lobby’).

Tony Judt: Jewish conspiracy and reasons for believing in it

On 12 October 2007 there was a conference at Chicago University on ‘academic freedom’ and in defence of Norman Finkelstein. The assumption of the conference was that academic freedom in general and Finkelstein in particular have come under illegitimate and powerful attack by the Israel Lobby. Tony Judt (2007) spoke the following words:⁶⁷

If you stand up here and say, as I am saying and someone else will probably say as well, that there is an Israel lobby, that there is... there are a set of Jewish organizations, who do work, both in front of the scenes and behind the scenes, to prevent certain kinds of conversations, certain kinds of criticism and so on, you are coming very close to saying that there is a *de facto* conspiracy or if you like plot or collaboration to prevent public policy moving in a certain way or to push it in a certain way – and that sounds an awful lot like, you know, the Protocols of the Elders of Zion and the conspiratorial theory of the Zionist Occupational Government and so on – well if it sounds like it it’s unfortunate, but that’s just how it is. We cannot calibrate the truths that we’re willing to speak, if we think they’re true, according to the idiocies of people who happen to agree with us for their reasons.

It may well be true – I know this because I have received an email from him – that David Duke thinks he has found allies in John Mearsheimer or Stephen Walt or myself. But I remind you what Arthur Koestler said in Carnegie Hall in 1948 when he was asked, ‘Why do you criticize Stalin – don’t you know that there are people in this country, Nixon and what were not yet called McCarthyites, who also are anti-Communist and who will use your anti-Communism to their advantage?’ And Koestler’s response was the response that I think we should keep in mind when we are faced with the charge that we are giving hostages to crazy antisemites or whatever, and that is you can’t help other people agreeing with you for their reasons – you can’t help it if idiots once every 24 hours with their stopped political clock are on the same time as you. You have to say what you know to be true and be willing to defend it on your grounds and then accept the fact that people in bad faith will accuse you of having defended it or aligned yourself with the others on their grounds – that’s what freedom of speech means - it’s very uncomfortable. It puts you in bed sometimes with the wrong people.

Judt’s response to the charge that he, and Mearsheimer and Walt, provide a respectable vocabulary for the articulation of antisemitic conspiracy theory, is a surprisingly candid and flat denial of political responsibility and an explicit refusal to ‘calibrate’ claims in

⁶⁷ These words were transcribed from a sound file of his speech which was posted online (Judt 2007)

such a way as to make them unhelpful to antisemites. There are a number of elements to this defence which are worthy of discussion.

First, Judt admits that he comes ‘very close to saying that there is a *de facto* conspiracy or ... plot or collaboration’ and that ‘that sounds an awful lot like... the Protocols of the Elders of Zion and the conspiratorial theory of the Zionist Occupational Government (‘ZOG’) and so on’. He seems to imply that it is not just he who thinks this, but the others too, who are on the platform, including perhaps Tariq Ali, Noam Chomsky (by video), John Mearsheimer and Norman Finkelstien. He then says that antisemites ‘happen to agree with us’ (but for the wrong reasons) – they agree fundamentally on the claim that there is (something very close to) ‘a *de facto* conspiracy or ... plot or collaboration ‘that sounds an awful lot like the Protocols’ or the ZOG. He admits that the antisemitic conspiracy theorists say fundamentally the same as he and his collaborators (but for different reasons) a third time, when he says: ‘you can’t help it if idiots once every 24 hours with their stopped political clock are on the same time as you.’

Second, Judt makes an analogy with Koestler’s criticisms of Stalin in 1948. Koestler thinks that the gulag exists and he thinks that one has a responsibility to say so, even if this appears to vindicate anti-Communists who also think that the gulag exists and who say so loudly. So Judt thinks that a *de facto* Jewish conspiracy exists, and that he has a responsibility to say so even if antisemites, who also think that a Jewish conspiracy exists, are thereby apparently vindicated. The difference, however, is obvious. The gulag existed. A Jewish conspiracy, of the kind which has sufficient covert muscle to send the only super-power to war against its own interest, and to expel critics of Israel

from the American academy, does not exist. Indeed the McCarthyites were also conspiracy theorists who believed that America was falling under the spell of a Moscow plot which encompassed every liberal schoolteacher and every ‘red’ Hollywood actor. Koestler did not believe in the conspiracy, nor did he believe ‘anything very close’ nor a *‘de facto* conspiracy’ nor a ‘plot’ nor a ‘collaboration’. Koestler was not like Judt. In fact Judt’s anti-Zionism (although not the rest of his worldview) comes from the political tradition of those who did remain silent about the gulag on the grounds that to speak up would play into the hands of the imperialists. It is a political tradition which currently remains overwhelmingly silent about the crimes of any political movement or state which embraces anti-Zionist or anti-imperialist rhetoric. The left anti-Stalinists, Trotsky, Draper, Arendt, Koestler, Orwell, and the others, spoke out against the left commonsense of their day - that one should not criticize Stalin. Judt fails to speak out against the left commonsense of his day - which holds Israel, and the Jews who ‘support it’, to be both uniquely evil and uniquely powerful.

Third, Judt argues that the crucial factor distinguishing him from the antisemitic idiots is the reasoning behind the analysis. The analysis is fundamentally the same, but he believes in the existence of (‘something that sounds an awful lot like’) a *‘de facto* conspiracy’ because it exists, whereas David Duke believes in it because he is an antisemite. Duke’s antisemitism has, on this one occasion, just by chance, led him to a true conclusion concerning the global threat of Jewish power and its responsibility for war. Judt’s problem seems to be that he is unable – or unwilling - to show how what he believes is different from what the idiot antisemites believe. He is only able – or willing – to show that he has better reasons for believing it. While Duke (2004) believes that a

global conspiracy based on the theory of ‘Jewish supremacism’ is responsible for all wars, Judt believes only that it is responsible for this war and that the antisemitic conspiracy theorists were wrong about the other wars.

Fourth, Judt says: ‘You have to say what you know to be true and be willing to defend it on your grounds and then accept the fact that people in bad faith will accuse you of having defended it or aligned yourself with the others on their grounds... It puts you in bed sometimes with the wrong people’. Judt accuses his accusers of acting in bad faith – he relies on an *ad hominem* argument. In this way he puts motivation at the centre of his defence. He is a good guy, he is on the left and he is motivated by the search for truth and justice (for the Palestinians). David Duke, who happens on this occasion to have stumbled onto the truth about the Israel lobby and its responsibility for war, has done so out of a malignant motivation. Those who ask why Judt and Duke have been discovered together in the bed of (*de facto*) Jewish conspiracy theory, claims Judt, do so in bad faith. The bad faith is that of the Israel lobby mendaciously playing the antisemitic card in order to de-legitimize Judt’s unmasking of the lobby by portraying it as similar to Duke’s unmasking of the lobby.

My argument about the potential danger of Judt’s conspiracy theory is not an *ad hominem* argument. It does not rely on an accusation of bad faith nor of malicious motivation. It does not accuse Judt of being secretly or unconsciously motivated by antisemitism. But it does point to the suggestion that Judt is insufficiently concerned about saying the same thing, using the same language and drawing on the same images as generations of antisemitic conspiracy theorists. Judt’s response is ‘it’s unfortunate, but that’s just how it

is'. But it is not a coincidence which puts Judt in David Duke's political bed. He is there because Duke is saying the same as Judt and Judt refuses to 'calibrate' his claims such they become useless to Duke. If we are 'telling a truth' which puts us in bed with David Duke then perhaps it is reasonable to conclude that we are telling it wrong - or at least in an incomplete way. Judt does not find himself in this predicament because he is, like Duke, motivated by antisemitism. Judt is not motivated by antisemitism. But perhaps motivation is not the key here. The key is what Judt says and what he does; not what motivates him. The danger of licensing antisemitic claims and world-views, of acting as midwife to an antisemitic movement, is not neutralized by the fact that Judt is an antiracist and a respected intellectual. Indeed the fact that Judt is widely thus recognized exacerbates the danger.

(iii) The diminishing caution over the expression of antisemitism

We have seen case studies which illustrate the tendency to deny any particular manifestation of antisemitism which is related to hostility to Israel, and we have seen case studies which show how the imagery and the rhetoric of contemporary antiracist anti-Zionism tends to mirror older antisemitic imagery and rhetoric. We now move beyond denial and beyond the replication of antisemitic tropes to more explicit articulations of antisemitic claims, but which are still made using the language of anti-Zionism.

Jenny Tonge and control of the Western World

The Liberal Democrats are the centre party in UK politics, generally understood to be politically to the left of the Conservatives and to the right of Labour. Notwithstanding the complexities of such a characterization, they are a mainstream party in British political life and could not be understood as either an extreme left wing or an extreme right wing party. Jenny Tonge was fired as a Liberal Democrat spokesperson in January

2004 after having said that if she had been a Palestinian, she would have considered becoming a suicide bomber.⁶⁸

There are two senses in which these remarks are interesting. Firstly they demonstrate an ignorance of conditions in Palestine and of Palestinian politics and of Palestinian paramilitary capability. Palestinians respond to the world in which they live in a whole number of different ways; some respond politically, as nationalists, as socialists, as Islamists; some try to look after their communities, as doctors, as teachers, as leaders; some struggle to look after themselves and their families; some are involved in peace organizations and in groups which aim to bridge the divide; some argue for a boycott of Israel; some engage in forms of armed resistance. It is not empirically true that Palestinians have no choice other than to blow themselves up near Israelis. The overwhelming majority of Palestinians find other ways to live and other ways to respond.

Yet Tonge's premise is that 'if she were Palestinian' then she would think differently from the way that she does, being British. It is difficult to escape the conclusion that at the bottom of such a sentiment is an 'orientalist' (Said 1978) othering of Palestinians. I am British, so I am a Member of Parliament, I think, I act politically, I speak. But if I were Palestinian then I would not think and reflect and act politically or ethically, but rather I would be driven by rage to the only course open to me, which would be suicide bombing. I would be forced to extinguish my life in a drama of anger and despair because no other form of expression would be open to me, *if I was a Palestinian*. But the truth is that most Palestinians do not act as though reading from the script of a twentieth century orientalist movie; they do not act the part of the irrational emotional anger-driven Arab, who has no choice and who cannot think beyond their fury. Tonge misrepresents, de-politicizes and essentializes Palestine.

⁶⁸ This is a sentiment that has been expressed by a number of other high profile people, for example Cherie Blair (News.BBC.co.uk 2002), who said: 'As long as young people feel they have no hope but to blow themselves up, we're never going to make progress, are we?' And Ken Livingstone, who said: 'Palestinians don't have jet fighters, they only have their bodies to use as weapons. In that unfair balance, that's what people use' (Lappin 2006).

Having been sacked from her job by the Liberal Democrat leadership, and then ‘elevated’ to the House of Lords, by the nomination of the same leadership, Tonge said the following on 20 September 2006:

The pro-Israeli lobby has got its grips on the Western World; its financial grips. I think they’ve probably got a certain grip on our party.⁶⁹

It seems unlikely that Tonge’s use of Mearsheimer & Walt’s (2006a & 2006b) terminology is accidental. In Tonge’s hands the term ‘lobby’ slips and slides off all the way back to antisemitic conspiracy theory. She is not describing a social phenomenon, a powerful lobbying organization, a well-funded political campaign, because the word ‘grips’ is incompatible with any of these possible interpretations. Something that has in its grips, the western world no less, has gone beyond anything that the international relations professors could conceivably have been describing. How does the ‘lobby’ grip the western world? Tonge is explicit: financially.

One kind of slippage to which the ‘lobby’ rhetoric lends itself is in implying that different campaigns with different aims and different politics are all, really, one. For Tonge, the term ‘pro-Israel lobby’ conflates all of the different campaigns into a strong enough centralized leadership to get a ‘grip’ on, not only political parties, but the whole of the ‘western world’. She is talking about a conspiracy with sufficient power to dominate on a global scale. Financial power. Another old antisemitic theme is the connection of Jews to money and finance. Tonge’s language is not appropriate to describe a situation where ‘pro-Israel’ campaigns have won support; it is only appropriate to describe a situation where there is a huge financial conspiracy to corrupt and to lie.

Jenny Tonge may be unaware of what the language that she uses means and the secondary meanings that it connotes. She is not a naïve newcomer to these debates. And she did not backtrack or apologize when the problem was pointed out to her. Instead she defiantly responded with her own version of the *Livingstone formulation*: ‘I am sick of being accused of antisemitism when what I am doing is criticizing Israel and the state of Israel.’ (www.InMinds.co.uk 2007)

⁶⁹ This part of her speech was broadcast on Radio 4’s Today programme the morning after the remarks were made, and transcribed by Hirsh (2006e)

Chris Davies: Jews, oppressors, Auschwitz and apartheid

The meeting at which Tonge made her ‘Lobby’ comments was organized by Chris Davies, who had been the leader of the Liberal Democrats in the European Parliament until some months earlier, when he had also been forced to resign. On returning home from a trip to Gaza, Davies expressed his anger and his horror at conditions there on his website and in the press. One comment he made was:

I visited Auschwitz last year and it is very difficult to understand why those whose history is one of such terrible oppression appear not to care that they have themselves become oppressors.⁷⁰

This was a classic example of the ‘Jews should know better’ argument. The Jews ‘appear not to care that they have themselves become oppressors’. He could only mean ‘the Jews’. He is talking about ‘those whose history is of such terrible oppression’, who came to his mind when he visited Auschwitz. Jews used to be oppressed; now they are oppressors, and they don’t even care (apparently).

This generalization, that the Jews have become oppressors, goes to the heart of that current of contemporary antisemitism which is connected to anger with Israel. Davies shifts focus from acts which he understands as oppressive to those people who he holds responsible for them and he calls them ‘oppressors’. And then he adds that they (apparently) don’t care. As though Jews spoke with one voice (or cared with a single conscience).

The overwhelming majority of the Jews who were at Auschwitz (where Davies visited as a tourist, or perhaps as a VIP) left that place through the chimney. Many of them, one may assume, did not have time to sit down and ponder the lessons that they were supposed, by this Member of the European Parliament, to have been learning there. What were the lessons being taught to at Auschwitz? What should ‘the Jews’ have learnt from the *Shoah* experience? It would seem that the lesson learned by many Jews from Auschwitz is ‘next time, have more tanks and fighter planes’; ‘Have more powerful friends’ perhaps, too. Many Jews learnt the central lesson that the twentieth century

⁷⁰ These words did appear on Chris Davies’ website but do not appear there now (June 07). They are cited in Hirsh (2006g)

seemed to go to such lengths to teach so many people: ‘If you don’t have a nation state of your own, then you have no rights’. It is hardly a surprise or a sign of a moral deficiency if this lesson was taken on board. The corollary to this lesson is that ‘if you don’t look after ‘your own’ then nobody else will look after you’. Many Israelis seem to be more attached to these lessons than to the ‘Jews should know better than to oppress others’ lesson that we might think they ought to have learnt.

It was, of course not just ‘the Jews’ who learnt this lesson in the twentieth century but many others too. The Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian Empires taught people across central and Eastern Europe, as well as across the Middle East, the same lesson. And so the fall of these two Empires in 1918 was followed by upsurges of ethnic nationalism and bloody struggles to carve out nation states in Czech and Slovakia, Poland, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria Turkey and throughout the region. Following the Second World War, the big European Empires faced nationalist opposition throughout Africa and Asia, and were pushed out by people who also had learnt the lesson of the twentieth century, ‘If you don’t have a nation state of your own, then you have no rights’. Following the break-up of the Soviet Empire in 1989, many more people learnt the lesson that history had taught them. And so in Croatia, Serbia, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Czech and Slovakia, there were struggles for ‘national’ independence, often trampling on the rights of minorities who were held not to be part of the nation that was to be self-determined (Arendt 1975; Fine 2001).

Before Hitler came to power many Jews rejected this narrow politics of nationhood, ‘national liberation’ and ‘self-determination’. Most Jews chose, either through political commitment or through inertia, not to go to Palestine to build a Jewish state. Zionism was an eccentric, utopian, minority project amongst Jews. It was only during the 1930s and 1940s, when the Nazi plan to sweep Europe clean of Jews came together that nationalist politics really began to take hold amongst Jews. The European labour movement and the European left had been defeated and the Jews who had put their faith in it were killed or were running for their lives. Jews from the great cosmopolitan cities of the Middle East were later pushed out of their homes by Arab nationalist regimes which had also been busy learning the ‘gotta have a state’ lesson. A million Russian

Jews came in the 1990s after enduring decades of Soviet antisemitism, which had come packaged in the language of hostility to Zionist imperialism.

And of course many Palestinians have learnt the lesson of the twentieth century too: no state, no rights. Without a state of their own, they have been treated appallingly both by Israel and by a number of Arab states. None of this is to support the politics of nationalism. But analysis begins with the world as it is and this is a world structured by the fact that human rights, in the absence of a nation state to guarantee them, have often, under pressure, turned out to be worthless promises. So the cosmopolitan task, in Israel/Palestine and also further afield, is to find a politics that creates a different truth for the 21st century. (Hirsh 2003; Fine 2007)

Jews straggling out of Europe in the late 1940s can hardly be blamed if most of them didn't set changing the world in a cosmopolitan direction as their immediate goal. Most of them wanted to feel safe and many believed that the only way they could feel safe was in a state of their own. But Chris Davies divides the world into 'oppressed' peoples and 'oppressor' peoples. 'The oppressed' are the Jews who arrived in Israel after being pushed out of Europe, the Middle East and more recently the Soviet Union. 'The oppressors' are those Jews a few years or decades later, along with their children and grandchildren.

In truth Chris Davies' confusion as to whether Jews are 'oppressed' or 'oppressors' is far from new. Jews have often been treated by parts of the left as either one or the other, good or bad, on 'our side' or on 'their side'. Jews have been much more comfortably understood by some only as victims or as global threat. Much analysis on the topic of Israel and Palestine deals with entirely abstract notions: evil 'Zionism' that stands for global imperialism and good Palestinian revolutionaries who represent the vanguard of the global *intifada*. For many commentators, Israel and Palestine, as well as Iraq, are not important or interesting in themselves but are only interesting inasmuch as they represent the good and evil of the global struggle. Darfur does not have this emblematic status, neither does Congo; hence the millions of deaths there are not big issues on the European and American left.

Jews do not all think the same thing. Some Jews learnt different political lessons from the Holocaust to other Jews. It was neither evil nor stupid to think, after the Holocaust, that Jews would have been in less trouble if they had a state and an army. It is the Israeli government that is responsible for Israeli policy, not ‘the Jews’ who used to be ‘oppressed’ and are now ‘oppressors’.

Davies did resign as the leader of the Liberal Democrat group in the European Parliament. He was not sacked because he criticized Israel or because the ‘Jewish lobby’ forced him out. A constituent criticized him for comparing current Israeli policy to the Holocaust. He replied with a one-line e-mail: ‘Sounds like racism to me. I hope you enjoying wallowing in your own filth.’

She responded that this was a disgraceful way to reply to a constituent’s e-mail. Rather than apologize, he wrote back to her denouncing Israeli policy and the ‘Jewish lobby’. When he was asked to comment by a local Jewish newspaper, he said that at the time he had received a number of abusive emails. He then offered to enter into a dialogue with his constituent on the condition that she first detail her own disagreements with Israeli policy.

Was this an example of the pro-Israel lobby forcing the resignation of a critic of Israeli human rights abuses by employing a dishonest charge of antisemitism? Let us analyze carefully how ‘the lobby’ achieved this. Firstly, *Jewish News* reported Chris Davies’ comments which he had already put on his own website. Then a number of people sent abusive emails to Davies. Then the *Jewish News* reader sent him an email criticizing him for comparing Israel’s treatment of Palestinians in the West Bank with the Holocaust. In the meantime, I myself had written a piece on *The Guardian* website (*Cif*) criticizing Davies’ use of the clichéd Jews-should-know-better argument (a re-working of which appears above). *Jewish News* went to the leadership of the Liberal Democrats for a comment, and Menzies Campbell, then the leader of the party, fired Chris Davies (by mutual agreement).

One free weekly newspaper; a number of angry people sending abusive e-mails; at least one more considered e-mail writer and a sociology lecturer with access to *The Guardian's* website. This constellation of mighty influence was predictably presented as a manifestation of the power of the global 'lobby' which smoothly moved into action to have this critic of Israel punished.

Chris Davies was not forced to resign because he criticized Israel but he did say a number of things that one could argue made him an unsuitable person to hold the post of Liberal Democrat leader in the European Parliament. None of these things include criticizing Israeli policy which is an entirely reasonable thing to do.

Firstly he made use of two analogies which are routinely used not to shed light on the Israel/Palestine conflict, but to demonize Israel and to foster a commonsense popular loathing of Israel. The Israel/Palestine conflict is a nasty and long-running dispute over (on a global scale) a small amount of territory, in which neither party is entirely right or wrong. The Israeli occupation of the West Bank relies on organized daily violence, repression and humiliation of Palestinians. But the occupation is not the result of an Israeli wish to dominate or of a particularly Israeli cruelty. It is the result of a long and violent dispute between Jews and Arabs, and Israelis and Palestinians in which those who have argued for peace and reconciliation on both sides have usually been defeated politically. Many Palestinian responses to the occupation (and to the presence of Jews in Israel) have been murderous and self-defeating. But the idea that Israel is a Nazi state is absurd and offensive. There is not, and there never has been, a genocide of Palestinians; there are no Israeli gas-chambers, concentration camps or *Einsatzgruppen*; the numbers of deaths on both sides throughout the conflict are analogous to the number of murders that the Nazi regime routinely committed every few minutes.⁷¹

⁷¹ When it is pointed out to anti-Zionists who use the Zionism-Nazi analogy that the analogy is not appropriate, they often respond with something like the following : "The Gazans, you tell us, are not facing genocide. Indeed. We must really give Israel high marks for not killing all of them? They are facing starvation, in plain and simple English - food, medicines, electricity and fuel are being stopped at the border, not to mention students who cannot leave to study. So all that is not important, as long as there is no genocide? I cannot believe that you are comfortable with this.... Are you really comfortable with Israel's continued barbarities? If so, please tell us." This was written a well known boycott supporter on the internal UCU activists list under the heading 'Not yet enough hell in Gaza'. As well as giving readers a

The use of the apartheid analogy is designed to isolate Israel as South Africa previously had been, as an illegitimate state. The analogy is not designed to shed light but to act as a short-cut to the boycott conclusion. The analogy could be used, honestly, to illuminate some aspects of the occupation, but when used politically it often functions as a method of demonizing rather than of explaining. Many other analogies are more appropriate, for example analogies with nationalist movements in the Balkans or in other fragments of the old empires. There is a serious situation in the West Bank, where Jewish settlers, backed by Israel, do live in a legally privileged relationship with Palestinians which does have some resemblance to apartheid. They do enjoy privileged legal rights, democratic rights, rights of movement, rights to resources, rights to water. But it is because the situation is not the same as the former South Africa that most Israelis think that the Jewish settlers ought to go home to Israel; a peace between Israel and Palestine will not be forged in a unitary state (like the new South Africa). It is much more likely to be a two state solution precisely because this is a struggle between two national communities, not a struggle against an apartheid system of racism.⁷²

So Davies made use of two demonizing analogies. He also claimed that Jews had now become ‘oppressors’ and that they don’t seem to care. This claim, that the Jews are oppressors, is particularly inflammatory in the context of the North West of England, which he represents in the European Parliament, where the BNP (the neo-Nazi British National Party) is trying to organize the ‘white’ vote and the Islamists are trying to organize the ‘Muslim’ vote. To characterize Jews as oppressors in this context is not trivial. And then Davies insulted his constituent who criticized him by denouncing her as a racist (because he assumed she was a ‘Zionist’) and writing ‘I hope you are enjoying wallowing in your own filth.’

small taste of the quality of the boycott debate within the union, it is also an example of a standard anti-Zionist form of argument. It concedes that the Nazi analogy is inappropriate but then insists that the one can infer that the one who said it was inappropriate therefore thinks that there is no problem in Gaza. Either Gaza is like the Warsaw Ghetto or it is like North London – there can be no middle position. Anti-Zionism often sets up spurious binary oppositions and insists that we choose one or the other. Notice that in this case, it also presents a false picture of events (there is no starvation in Gaza), and, particularly since it is repeated again and again and with authority, many people accept that picture of events as true.

⁷² See Strawson (2006) for an excellent legal analysis of the Zionism-apartheid analogy.

He denounced what he called the ‘Jewish lobby’ which, he claimed, has too much influence. He later said that he stood by this comment, but admitted that he did not understand the distinction between the claim that there is a ‘Jewish lobby’ and the claim that there is a ‘pro-Israel’ lobby. The Mearsheimer and Walt paper had only been published for a few months at this time, and Davies had not yet learned the terminology he ought to have used to express his conspiracy theory while protecting himself from a charge of antisemitism.

Chris Davies is not an anti-Semite in the sense that it is unlikely that he was motivated by Jew-hatred, but he was guilty of negligence. Davies went out of his way to intervene in the Israel/Palestine conflict and he took an extremist position which he fiercely defended. But he did not educate himself with any seriousness about the conflict and he did not educate himself about the nature of contemporary antisemitism. When he was publicly challenged over the potentially antisemitic discourse that he seemed to be buying into through ignorance, instead of stopping to think about it, he angrily refused to consider the possibility. It is unlikely that he is similarly careless, thoughtless or ignorant when it comes to anti-black racism or anti-Muslim racism. Liberals and politicians on the left do not make the same kind of mistakes when emailing their black or Asian constituents.

There is not necessarily a choice to be made about whether to oppose Islamophobia or anti-Jewish racism; it is possible and democratic to oppose both. If we fail to stand against both then we become partisans for the extreme end of one nationalism, or fundamentalism, or the other.

How antisemitism can become acceptable amongst antiracists

The two Liberal Democrat politicians, Tonge and Davies, seem to have stumbled into antisemitism without understanding what they were doing and without understanding the significance of what they were doing or saying. True, they refused to take the possibility of antisemitism seriously, even after the problems were pointed out to them, but they are not people who think of themselves as antisemites.

Gilad Atzmon does not think of himself as an antisemite either, but he is much more self-conscious and knowing when he plays with antisemitic formulations, ideas and rhetoric. The Socialist Workers Party and the Scottish Palestine Solidarity Campaign are not put off by Atzmon's use of antisemitic language and they continue proudly to host him at their events. He is a former Israeli paratrooper, a well-known jazz saxophonist, a campaigner for Palestine and someone who is comfortable employing openly anti-Jewish rhetoric. For example: 'I would suggest that perhaps we should face it once and for all: the Jews were responsible for the killing of Jesus who, by the way, was himself a Palestinian Jew.' (Atzmon 2003). For example:

American Jewry makes any debate on whether the 'Protocols of the elder of Zion' are an authentic document or rather a forgery irrelevant. American Jews (in fact Zionists) do control the world.' (Atzmon 2003)

For example:

To regard Hitler as the ultimate evil is nothing but surrendering to the Zio-centric discourse. To regard Hitler as the wickedest man and the Third Reich as the embodiment of evilness is to let Israel off the hook. To compare Olmert to Hitler is to provide Israel and Olmert with a metaphorical moral shield. It maintains Hitler at the lead and allows Olmert to stay in the tail.... Israel has already established a unique interpretation of the notion of wickedness that has managed to surpass any other evil. It is about time we internalise the fact that Israel and Zionism are the ultimate Evil with no comparison. ... Now is the time to stand up and say it, *unlike the Nazis who had respect for other national movements including Zionism*, Israel has zero respect for anyone including its next door neighbours. The Israeli behaviour should be realised as the ultimate vulgar biblical barbarism on the verge of cannibalism. Israel is nothing but evilness for the sake of evilness. It is wickedness with no comparison. (Atzmon 2006a)

In November 2006, Atzmon spoke and played music at an event in Edinburgh organized by the Scottish Palestine Solidarity Campaign entitled *Zionist Control*. His argument (Atzmon 2006b) at that event was that the clean distinction which anti-Zionists make between 'Zionists' and Jews, anti-Zionism and antisemitism is largely fictional. He argued that Israel is a 'fascist state' supported by 'the vast majority of Jewish people around the world'. Anti-Zionist Jews in the Palestine solidarity movement, therefore, play a *Jewish* role there, as gatekeepers who try to control the Palestinian narrative:

As soon as anyone identifies the symptoms of Zionism with some fundamental or essential Jewish precepts a smear campaign is launched against that person. (Atzmon 2006b)

Atzmon fights for explicitly anti-Jewish politics within the Palestine solidarity movement and in order to win, it is necessary first for him to defeat the anti-Zionist Jews and their antiracist allies:

I would use this opportunity and appeal to our friends amongst the Jewish socialists and other Jewish solidarity groups. I would ask them to clear the stage willingly, and to re-join as ordinary human beings. The Palestinian Solidarity movement is craving for a change. It needs open gates rather than gatekeepers. It yearns for an open and dynamic discourse. The Palestinians on the ground have realised it already. They democratically elected an alternative vision of their future.⁷³ (Atzmon 2006b)

Atzmon's central problem with the Jewish anti-Zionists is that they, even though they themselves treat Israel as though it was demonic, also oppose openly antisemitic expression in the Palestine solidarity movement. He particularly opposes those who do this 'as Jews'. Atzmon is trying to lead an antisemitic purge of the anti-Zionist movement and one that will ditch the formal anti-racism onto which many anti-Zionists still cling. In spite of opposition to Atzmon, in which anti-Zionist Jews are active,⁷⁴ the Socialist Workers Party, as well as parts of the Palestine Solidarity Campaign,⁷⁵ continue to treat Atzmon as an antiracist and as a legitimate member of the Palestine solidarity movement.

The week after the Edinburgh event, Atzmon spoke at a Respect Party event, advertised in *Socialist Worker*, entitled 'Jazz Racism and Resistance'. *Socialist Worker* (2006), the following week, brought us the news that Gilad Atzmon was to feature in 'one of the biggest cultural events *Socialist Worker* has put on for many a year.' The report went on:

⁷³ Presumably the 'democratically elected ... alternative vision' that he refers to is the racist antisemitism of Jihadi Islam as set out in the Hamas Covenant (1988)

⁷⁴ The Jewish Socialist Group (2006) wrote an open letter in which it attempted to warn the Scottish Palestine Solidarity Campaign and the Socialist Workers Party what Atzmon was trying to do. Despite this, both of these organisations gave him a platform.

⁷⁵ At least one local PSC group, the Bucks. and Berks branch, sent out Atzmon's Edinburgh speech to its membership, in its mailing of 27 November, with the following introduction: 'Gilad Atzmon argues that the Palestine solidarity movement should focus soley [sic] on the Palestinian cause and urges Jewish sympathizers to support the Palestinians for what they are rather than expecting them to fit into a Jewish worldview.' Bucks and Berks PSC, here, is adopting Atzmon's antisemitic language, for example 'Jewish worldview', relating to 'Jewish sympathisers' within the Palestine Solidarity Campaign.

'Gilad declared, "I will be playing at the Cultures of Resistance concert because I support the Socialist Worker appeal."

Atzmon's writing regularly appears in *Counterpunch* (EG 2003a; 2006a) which thinks of itself as an antiracist journal. There are links to his writing on the PSC Gymru-Wales website,⁷⁶ *The Jerusalemites*⁷⁷ website, *Middle East Online*,⁷⁸ *Dissident Voice*⁷⁹, and many more 'respectable' Palestine solidarity publications.

Some Jewish and antiracist anti-Zionists have flirted with Holocaust denial by defending the appropriateness of comparisons between Israel and Nazi Germany. Some have routinely minimized antisemitism, often finding excuses for the rhetoric of Jewish conspiracy, Jewish domination of the media, Jewish power. Some have found excuses for movements that wish to wipe Israel off the map. Some have gone along with the 'truism' that people who talk about antisemitism do so dishonestly because they are part of a conspiracy to hide the crimes of 'Zionism'. Some have routinely fought for the commonsense notion that Israel is a uniquely serious human rights abuser. Atzmon shows how a charismatic leader could begin to harvest the antisemitic potential of these kinds of anti-Zionist staples into a concrete movement. There must be a possibility that antisemites may push the antiracist anti-Zionist leadership out of the way and may take over the anti-Zionist movement. The antiracist anti-Zionists are ripe for take-over if they do not understand their own part in the creation of this new current and if they don't know how to respond politically. They are being victimized by antisemites and they do not know how to defend themselves effectively. Atzmon wrote the following to an anti-Zionist Jewish blogger who has for years been churning out pieces that demonize Israel as a uniquely racist state:

⁷⁶ Palestine Solidarity Campaign Gymru-Wales, http://psccymru.org.uk/index.php?option=com_weblinks&catid=23&Itemid=49, downloaded 28 February 2007

⁷⁷ Jerusalemites, <http://www.jerusalemites.org/articles/english/2006/November/23.htm>, downloaded 28 February 2007

⁷⁸ Middle East Online, <http://www.middle-east-online.com/english/?id=17604>, downloaded 28 February 2007

⁷⁹ Dissident Voice, <http://www.dissidentvoice.org/Feb06/Atzmon07.htm>, downloaded 28 February 2007

You are now presented ‘as being a manifestation of Jewish exclusivity or supremacy on a par with the State of Israel’ on every left and pro Palestinian site around the world ... may I suggest that it is never too late, you can still join humanity. Chicken soup is not a political argument.

Atzmon is not satisfied with demonizing Israel. He demands also that anti-Zionist Jews cease to define themselves as Jews and only then may be accepted into the human community and the Palestine solidarity movement.⁸⁰ And Atzmon’s antisemitism is found acceptable by people who think of themselves as antiracists. Indeed, Atzmon was given space on the ‘antiracist’ *Guardian*’s website to denounce me as an ‘ultra-Zionist’, as a dishonest academic, as a ‘Zionist ideologist’, as someone who ‘needs antisemitism’. ‘Antisemitism (rather than anti-Israel political reaction) exists solely in the Zionist’s mind’, he assures us (Atzmon 2006c).

In November 2007 Atzmon was quoted as follows in *The Morning Star*, a newspaper which thinks of itself as anti-racist:

I know deep inside me that the Hebraic identity is the most radical version of the idea of Jewish supremacy, which is a curse for Palestine, a curse for Jews and a curse for the world. It is a major destructive force.... For an Israeli to humanise himself, he must de-zionise himself. In this way, self-hating can become a very productive power. It's the same sense of self-hating I find, too, in Jews who have given the most to humanity, like Christ, Spinoza or Marx. They bravely confronted their beast and, in doing so, they made sense to many millions. (Searle 2007)

⁸⁰ Atzmon is not a unique figure. He has a coterie of supporters, for example on the ‘Peace Palestine’ blog, <http://www.peacepalestine.blogspot.com/>. Also there are others in the Palestine solidarity movement who are increasingly comfortable with openly antisemitic rhetoric, such as Paul Eisen and Israel Shamir.

Part III Concept and discourse become concrete exclusion: Boycott

In parts I and II, I have been analyzing concepts and discourse. Part III turns to the actualization of concept and discourse as a concrete exclusion. There is a campaign to exclude Israelis, and only Israelis, from universities, sports stadia, theatres, concert halls – from the cultural and economic life of the world.

i A chronology of the campaign for a boycott of Israel

In Medieval times, Christians were not allowed to enter a Jewish synagogue; they were not allowed to celebrate a holiday with Jews; they were not allowed to go as guests to Jewish banquets and anyone thus ‘defiled by their impieties’ was in turn to be shunned by Christians (to quote from a canonical collection). It would be wrong to have ‘fellowship with God’s enemies’. Medieval England was especially active in excluding or ‘boycotting’ Jews. For example, at the 1222 Canterbury Council, Archbishop Langton threatened with excommunication any Christians who had any familiar dealings with Jews or even sold them provisions. In his first pastoral circular following election as Bishop of Lincoln, Robert Grosseteste enjoined his archdeacons, ‘as far as you are able, study to prevent the dwelling of Christians with Jews’. (Julius and Dershowitz 2007)

Boycotts against Jews and exclusions of Jews are not new. In 1904 there was a boycott of Jewish businesses in the city of Limerick in Ireland organized by the Catholic priest, the Rev. Father Creagh. Currently supporters of the campaign to boycott Israel are in the habit of marshalling the rhetoric of free speech. They portray those who are reluctant to discuss whether or not Israel is a unique evil, whether or not to exclude Israelis from our campuses, whether or not ‘Zionists’ control US foreign policy, as people who threaten free debate.⁸¹ The *Limerick Leader* expressed similar sentiment regarding the campaign to boycott the Jews in 1904, in a piece entitled ‘Hear all sides’:

⁸¹ For example Jacqueline Rose (2007), in a letter to *The Guardian* also signed by eight others: ‘The recent decision of the University and College Union congress was to organise a debate on whether an academic boycott of Israeli academic institutions would be an appropriate response to the occupation of Gaza and the West Bank. It was not a decision to inaugurate such a boycott. We are perplexed at the suggestion that there is something improper or undesirable about such a debate. The opponents of the boycott debate argue that a boycott is inimical to academic freedom, yet they are engaged in a campaign of vilification and intimidation in order to prevent a discussion of this issue. While defending academic freedom, therefore, they seem only too willing to make an assault on the freedom of speech. The UCU congress and its members have a right, and arguably a duty, to confront the ethical and political challenge represented by

In another column of our issue this evening we insert Mr. Davitt's letter to the *Freeman's Journal* on the subject of the Rev. Father Creagh's recent remarks on the Jewish community in Limerick. In giving the letter publicity we are not to be taken as adopting his views, our desire being merely to show all sides fair play.

The Leader is certainly not antisemitic, and it warns its readership that their opponents are in the habit of exaggerating any sniff of antisemitism in order to increase the campaign of vilification against the boycotters;

It has come to our knowledge that the Jews for the past few days have been subjected to ill-treatment and assault while passing through our public thoroughfares. We regret that such has been the case. We are living in critical times when every advantage is taken by unscrupulous opponents to misinterpret our acts and the cause of our religion. In such a crisis it is not wise to give a handle to vilification. If the people do not want the Jews, then leave them severely alone. Above all things have no recourse to violence. Such a policy only shows weakness, if not foolish vindictiveness, and will never succeed in accomplishing that which is, or may be desired. (Both quotations from *The Limerick Leader*, Monday evening, January 18 1904, quoted in Keogh and McCarthy 2005)

Father Creagh was also quite 'prepared to admit that there are many [Jews] who are irreproachable'. His boycott was only aimed at those Jews who 'grind and oppress those who are unfortunate enough to get into their power' (Reverend Father Creagh, 8 February 1904, *Northern Whig*, Belfast, quoted in Keogh and McCarthy 2005). In these short passages we have represented a number of extremely contemporary themes: boycotters' reliance on the rhetoric of free speech; the Jews as exaggerating and manipulating antisemitism to vilify the boycotters; the fact that the boycott is not against all Jews; the possibility of a test for good Jews who may be exempted from the boycott.

The Limerick boycott was organized at the height of the campaign against Jewish immigration into Britain which culminated with the passing of the Aliens Act in 1905. The British Trades Union Congress supported this Act, which constituted a nationalized boycott of Jews, and many trades unions supported a boycott of Jewish members. There

the repression in the occupied territories.' Note the classic slippage in the last sentence from a debate as to whether Israeli academics – and only Israeli academics – should be excluded from the academic community to a debate on how to 'confront the ... challenge represented by the repression in the occupied territories'; as though criticism of state policy and exclusion on the basis of nationality were the same thing. The accusation that opponents of the boycott are engaged in a campaign of 'vilification and intimidation' is Jacqueline Rose's version of the *Livingstone formulation*. The letter is also based on the false claim that Motion 30 at the 2007 UCU congress mandated a debate. In fact it mandated UCU to campaign for an academic boycott and to treat the PACBI argument for a boycott as a 'call'. It did not mention the circularity of asking British academics to 'respond' to the PACBI 'call' which was itself a response to the call of Stephen and Hilary Rose to issue a 'call'.

were also boycotts of Jewish businesses which were argued for by some who thought of themselves as being on the left as a stand against sweatshop labour and for trade union rates of pay (Cohen 2005).

A boycott of Jewish businesses was one of the tools in Hitler's armoury during the early days of Nazi rule in Germany and it was followed by a campaign to exclude Jews from the professions, the universities and then from any public or cultural space, transport, entertainment, arts, film and theatre. The contemporary campaign for a boycott of Israeli academic institutions situates itself in the tradition of the boycott against South African apartheid. It is perhaps worth remembering that there is also a less heroic strand to the boycott tradition.

A few months after the final defeat of German Nazism, on 2 December 1945, the newly formed Arab League Council declared the beginning of the Arab boycott: 'Jewish products and manufactured goods shall be considered undesirable to the Arab countries.' All Arab 'institutions, organizations, merchants, commission agents and individuals' were called upon 'to refuse to deal in, distribute, or consume Zionist products or manufactured goods.' (Bard 2007) The Arab boycott of Israel was supported by the Soviet Union, which invented contemporary left anti-imperialist anti-Zionism and which used it as a cover for antisemitism (Crooke 2004).

In April 2002 Steven and Hilary Rose 'initiated'⁸² the call for a moratorium on European research collaboration with Israel. Later they participated in setting up BRICUP⁸³, the British Campaign for the Universities of Palestine and PACBI⁸⁴, the Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel. It subsequently became an important element of their political rhetoric that they are not initiators of the boycott call but are, rather, responding passively to a call from within Palestine.

⁸² Steven and Hilary Rose did 'initiate' the call for a moratorium on European research collaboration with Israel in April 2002, according to Steven Rose's own account in his profile on *The Guardian's* website, *Comment Is Free*, http://commentisfree.guardian.co.uk/steven_rose/profile.html, downloaded 14 February 2005. It was later that they portrayed themselves as answering a Palestinian call rather than themselves initiating action.

⁸³ BRICUP, British Campaign for the Universities of Palestine, <http://www.bricup.org.uk/>

⁸⁴ PACBI, Palestinian Campaign for the Cultural and Academic Boycott of Israel, <http://www.pacbi.org/>

In May 2002 Mona Baker, an academic at UMIST⁸⁵, fired two Israeli academics, Miriam Shlesinger from the board of her journal, *The Translator* and Gideon Toury from the board of her journal, *Translation Studies Abstracts* because of their institutional connections to Israeli universities. Both have long and distinguished records as campaigners for human rights and for peace in Israel and Palestine.⁸⁶

In May 2003, Sue Blackwell proposed a motion (Woodward 2003) at AUT (Association of University Teachers) Council asking members to sever ‘any academic links they may have with official Israeli institutions, including universities.’ AUT Council discussed the motion and it was comfortably defeated.

In June 2003, Andrew Wilkie rejected⁸⁷ the application of an Israeli PhD student to study at Oxford University because he was Israeli and had therefore served in the armed forces.

In April 2005 Sue Blackwell came back to AUT council with what she said⁸⁸ was a more sophisticated and tactical attempt to win a boycott. She proposed to boycott three

⁸⁵ UMIST, University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology, subsequently merged with Manchester University

⁸⁶ Mona Baker’s ‘personal statement’ is available on her website at <http://www.monabaker.com/personalstatement.htm> (downloaded 14 February 2007), together with links to the correspondence she had with the woman who had been her friend, Miriam Shlesinger, and her letter to Gideon Toury. She writes: ‘In May 2002, following the sharp rise in the level of atrocities committed against the Palestinian population in the West Bank and Gaza, I decided to join the call to boycott Israeli academic institutions. The boycott was conceived along the same lines as the sanctions which ultimately led to the collapse of the apartheid regime in South Africa. The call was initiated by Professor Steven Rose (Physics, Open University) and Professor Hilary Rose (Bradford University). … I first wrote to Miriam Shlesinger (Bar Ilan University, Israel) on 23 May explaining my decision and asking her to resign from the Editorial Board of *The Translator*. She refused. I also wrote to Gideon Toury (Tel Aviv University, Israel) on 8 June along the same lines, asking him to resign from the panel of Consulting Editors of *Translation Studies Abstracts*. He too refused. I removed them both from the boards of the respective journals.’

⁸⁷ ‘Andrew Wilkie, the Nuffield professor of pathology and a fellow of Pembroke College, is under investigation after telling Amit Duvshani, a student at Tel Aviv university, that he and many other British academics were not prepared to take on Israelis because of the ‘gross human rights abuses’ he claims that they inflict on Palestinians. Prof Wilkie made the comments after Mr Duvshani, 26, wrote to him requesting the opportunity to work in Prof Wilkie’s laboratory towards a PhD thesis. Mr Duvshani, who is in the last months of a master’s degree in molecular biology, included a CV detailing his academic and outside experience, including his mandatory three-year national service in the Israeli army....In a reply sent by email on June 23, Prof Wilkie wrote: ‘Thank you for contacting me, but I don’t think this would work. I have a huge problem with the way that the Israelis take the moral high ground from their appalling treatment in the Holocaust, and then inflict gross human rights abuses on the Palestinians because they [the Palestinians] wish to live in their own country. I am sure that you are perfectly nice at a personal level, but no way would I take on somebody who had served in the Israeli army. As you may be aware, I am not the only UK scientist with these views but I’m sure you will find another lab if you look around.’ (Henry 2003)

particular Israeli Universities. She also said that she now had a ‘clear call from Palestinians’. There was a truncated debate at Council which did not include speeches against the motion. AUT Council voted to boycott Bar-Ilan University, citing its links with Ariel College in the occupied West Bank.⁸⁹ It voted to boycott Haifa University on the basis of allegations concerning academic freedom there centering on the Teddy Katz case and on claims made by an anti-Zionist academic at Haifa, Ilan Pappe.⁹⁰ And AUT council voted to ‘refer back’ proposals to boycott Hebrew University, Jerusalem, on the basis of a claim that the university was building a new dorm block on Palestinian land.⁹¹

About 300, mainly Jewish, academics resigned from AUT (see for example Lappin 2005). More might have resigned but for a group who formed the *Engage* network and website,⁹² which argued that the vote could be reversed only if academics remained within the union (see Geras 2005 for the opposite case).

Jon Pike, a founder of Engage and a Philosophy lecturer at Open University, organized the required signatures of Council members to force the union to hold a Special Council to re-examine the issue of the boycotts. Debates were held up and down the country in AUT local associations. The boycotters did not win their position in any of these debates.

In May 2005 there was a five hour debate at the Special Council meeting on the issue. This meeting was better attended than any routine council meeting and it was connected to the opinions of members by the preceding debates. Special Council decided to rescind the boycotts and to set up a Special Commission to work out a policy. In April 2006,

⁸⁸ ‘It’s a tactical attempt to get it through,’ admits Birmingham’s Sue Blackwell, one of the motion’s authors. ‘We’ve got to be a bit more sophisticated. We are now better organised. One of the reasons we didn’t win last time was that there was no clear public call from Palestinians for the boycott. Now we have that, in writing.’ (Curtis 2005)

⁸⁹ For a presentation of the case against Bar-Ilan University, see Avnery (2005). For a discussion of the issue and of Avnery’s case, see Hirsh (2005).

⁹⁰ For a presentation of the case against Haifa University see Zalman (2005). For Haifa University’s response through its solicitor Anthony Julius, see the Haifa University website at http://boycottnews.haifa.ac.il/html/html_eng/AUT.pdf, downloaded 14 February 2005.

⁹¹ For the case against Hebrew University see Yamada (2004). For Hebrew University’s reply, through its lawyer Anthony Julius, see www.EngageOnline.org.uk at <http://www.engageonline.org.uk/archives/index.php?id=46>.

⁹² www.liberoblog.com (no longer operational) and later www.EngageOnline.org.uk For more on the birth of Engage, see Hirsh (2005a).

AUT's Special Commission, in part directly elected by union members, proposed a consistent and thought-through policy⁹³ which related to international 'greylisting' and boycotts. It was a policy that left open the possibility of boycotting universities but which set forward a consistent procedure to be followed. Crucially, a university, it recommended, can only be boycotted if the academic union at that institution calls for it. The AUT Council in 2006 adopted these recommendations as policy but the policy fell shortly afterwards, when AUT merged with Natfhe, the National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education.⁹⁴

At its last conference, three days before the merger, Natfhe voted for a motion at its conference to boycott those Israeli academics who do not 'publicly dissociate themselves' from 'Israel's apartheid policies'. The leadership of AUT and Natfhe responded by saying that this policy did not stand in the new union.

In May 2006, Richard Seaford of Exeter University refused to review a book for an Israeli journal saying: 'I have, along with many other British academics, signed the academic boycott of Israel, in the face of the brutal and illegal expansionism, and the slow-motion ethnic cleansing, being practised by your government.' (Halkin 2006)

In April 2007, the conference of the National Union of Journalists passed a motion that instructed its executive committee to:

...continue to support the work of the Palestine Solidarity Campaign including the organisation of boycotts of Israeli goods, similar to those boycotts in the struggle against apartheid South Africa.⁹⁵

Following that decision by NUJ conference, many journalists and institutions protested at the decision, often calling for a ballot of members: the editor of *The Guardian*,⁹⁶ the Foreign Press Association,⁹⁷ *The Guardian* leader,⁹⁸ petitions of NUJ members at BBC

⁹³ See Document, Association of University Teachers (2005)

<http://www.aut.org.uk/circulars/html/la7753.html>, downloaded 14 February 2007.

⁹⁴ Jon Pike (2005; 2006b), who was a member of the Special Commission, discusses the issues underlying the debates around 'greylisting' policy, and defines his distinction between boycott as solidarity and boycott as punishment, or voluntary and non-voluntary boycott.

⁹⁵ Text of NUJ motion is here, on the Engage website:

<http://www.engageonline.org.uk/blog/article.php?id=967>

⁹⁶ <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/849987.html>

⁹⁷ <http://www.fpa.org.il/?categoryId=14190>

⁹⁸ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/leaders/story/0,,2061527,00.html>

News⁹⁹ and ITN¹⁰⁰; Jon Snow, news anchor at Channel 4 news;¹⁰¹ BBC London NUJ branch;¹⁰² NUJ chapel at Reuters;¹⁰³ NUJ Manchester branch.¹⁰⁴ What took the wind out of the sails of this campaign to reverse the boycott decision in NUJ, however, was the decision made at UCU (University and College Union) Congress in June.

In June 2007, the first congress of the new merged union, voted to support the boycott campaign. It instructed the National Executive to:

- circulate the full text of the Palestinian boycott call to all branches/LAs for information and discussion
- encourage members to consider the moral implications of existing and proposed links with Israeli academic institutions
- organise a UK-wide campus tour for Palestinian academic/educational trade unionists;
- issue guidance to members on appropriate forms of action

It also passed its version of the *Livingstone formulation*: ‘...criticism of Israel cannot be construed as anti-semitic.’ Congress affirmed this after a delegate had read out the following example of antisemitic ‘criticism’ of Israel during the debate, from Hassan Nasrallah, leader of Hezbollah:

If we searched the entire world for a person more cowardly, despicable, weak and feeble in psyche, mind, ideology and religion, we would not find anyone like the Jew. Notice, I do not say the Israeli. (this quote comes originally from Saad-Ghorayeb 2002:170)

High profile Jewish supporters of the boycott campaign played an important role. Their repeated assurances that antisemitism was not a relevant issue succeeded in neutralizing it as a factor in the debate. From the *Independent Jewish Voices* initiative in February, to the BRICUP fringe meeting at Bournemouth, to the debate itself at UCU Congress, respectable and senior Jewish academics, intellectuals and political activists repeated again and again, when considering the plan to boycott Israeli academia – and only Israeli academia – that antisemitism was relevant only insofar as it was a spurious charge that ‘Zionists’ or the ‘pro-Israel lobby’ would throw at ‘critics of Israel’. The message was

⁹⁹ <http://www.engageonline.org.uk/blog/article.php?id=985>

¹⁰⁰ <http://www.engageonline.org.uk/blog/article.php?id=991>

¹⁰¹ http://www.totallyjewish.com/news/national/?content_id=6186

¹⁰² <http://stopnujboycott.blogspot.com/2007/05/london-branch-calls-for-ballot.html>

¹⁰³ <http://www.engageonline.org.uk/fighting/article.php?id=39>

¹⁰⁴ <http://www.engageonline.org.uk/fighting/article.php?id=40>

repeated by Jacqueline Rose, Jonathan Rosenhead, John Rose, Rosemary Bechler, Steven Rose, Hilary Rose, Michael Cushman, Haim Bresheeth, Ilan Pappe, Jews for Justice for Palestinians, Independent Jewish Voices, Brian Klug, Antony Lerman – and the message was repeated by these people and groups not just on the basis that they think it to be true, but on the basis that they speak '*as Jews*'. When these well respected and high profile antiracist Jews reassure the British intelligentsia that there is not a contemporary threat of antisemitism, we should not be surprised that they are believed. Not all of the above individuals and organizations support boycotts. But they all argue that it is legitimate to have an on-going debate about whether Israelis should be excluded; and they agree that allegations of antisemitism are wildly and dishonestly exaggerated. The role they played in helping to win the UCU to support the boycott campaign was not to make the argument for a boycott; it was to help to neutralize the issue of antisemitism.

The slogan that 'criticism of Israel cannot be construed as antisemitism' should be reversed, because in truth, antisemitism cannot be construed as criticism of Israeli actions or policies. Antisemitism is not critical, it is necessarily mendacious, cannot help Palestinians and it demands no critical response from those against whom it is directed.

UNISON¹⁰⁵, the biggest union in Britain before the merger of AMICUS and the T&G (Transport and General Workers Union) to form UNITE, decided to make its support for the boycott campaign clear on June 20 2007: 'Conference believes that ending the occupation demands concerted and sustained pressure upon Israel including an economic, cultural, academic and sporting boycott.' Tony Greenstein, an anti-Zionist activist who had been steadfastly making the same speeches for 30 years, that Zionism is racism, that the Zionists collaborated with the Nazis, that Israel must be dismantled,

¹⁰⁵ In UNISON the hunt to root out 'Zionism' began even before the vote to support the boycott campaign. Labourstart is an international trade union network and website, which carries news and publishes calls for trade union solidarity and reports on activity. UNISON had asked Eric Lee, the editor of Labourstart, what it could do to help, so Eric asked for a donation of £2000. The international affairs committee agreed and the decision to ratify this went to the national executive. Eric Lee: 'A member of the executive said they had three questions for me: was it true that I was a Zionist?; does Labourstart censor Palestinian news?; and had I supported the Israeli invasion of Lebanon last year?' Mr Lee responded: 'It is no secret that I am a left-wing Zionist, as are many Israelis. Labourstart has links to Palestinian sites and they take many of our news items, and I took the same view of Lebanon as did Tony Blair and the Labour government. 'The [question of the] donation was then sent back to the first [international affairs] committee.' The issue of the donation went back to the executive a second time, 'but they decided it was too controversial so they turned it down. <http://www.thejc.com/home.aspx?ParentId=m11s18&SecId=18&AId=53345&ATypeId=1>

suddenly found himself being given a standing ovation by UNISON Conference for a speech in favour of the boycott. ‘I was overwhelmed by the reaction of delegates’ he said.¹⁰⁶ The T&G section of UNITE also passed policy supporting the boycott campaign in July 2007.

(ii) A critical examination of the debate over an academic boycott of Israel

At the 2005 AUT conference where the decision was made (later to be reversed) to boycott Bar-Ilan and Haifa universities, the case for boycott was made in a very straightforward way. Advocates for the boycott stood up and made emotional speeches about how difficult life is in Palestine under Israeli occupation. They pointed to ways in which the human rights abuses committed against Palestinians are legal under Israeli law and they therefore declared that Israeli institutional racism constitutes apartheid. ‘We know what to do with an apartheid state,’ say the boycott advocates, ‘we boycott it.’ ‘We are academics so we are therefore under an obligation to boycott Israeli colleagues as a gesture of solidarity with Palestine.’

The PACBI case for a boycott relies heavily on the analogy with apartheid South Africa. Emphasis is thus taken off the case for boycott itself, because the case for boycotting apartheid South Africa, including its academics, is taken as a given truth by the majority of the antiracist audience of the boycott campaign. So once PACBI succeeds in characterizing Israel as ‘apartheid’ then support for the boycott follows automatically.¹⁰⁷

(a) The Political Test

One difficulty for the boycott campaign is how to respond to criticism that an academic boycott would exclude opponents of Israeli human rights abuses, Jewish, Christian or Muslim, who work at Israeli universities. One way of solving this problem is to offer a political test which, if the academic passes, would lead to immunity from the boycott. The 2006 Natfhe motion offered such a test when it suggested that the union should

¹⁰⁶ <http://www.thejc.com/home.aspx?ParentId=m12s30&SeId=30&AId=53602&ATypeId=1>

¹⁰⁷ PACBI makes its case for a boycott, relying on the apartheid analogy, on its website in a ‘Frequently Asked Questions’ format, <http://www.pacbi.org/faqs.htm>, downloaded 14 February 2007. See Hirsh (2006) for a rebuttal.

backlist members who ‘do not publicly dissociate themselves’ from Israel’s ‘apartheid policies’ (Pike 2006). The problem with this method is that the boycott campaign then lays itself open to criticism that it is undermining academic freedom with a ‘McCarthyite test’. The boycott would be targeted against people who were not ready to sign up to the required beliefs in public and under threat. Steve Cohen (2006) argues as follows:

Loyalty tests have a particular significance when forced on Jews. The significance is the assumption of collective responsibility, of collective guilt. Intrinsic to this is the requirement to grovel. Groveling, the humiliation of Jews, is fundamental to all antisemitism....

What was important [under MacCarthyism] was naming names – the degradation ceremony. Likewise the deep antisemitism behind the NATFHE resolution is not the boycott principle. It is the loyalty test on which it is based. It is the loyalty test more than anything else which exceptionalises Israel.... It may be that the loyalty test was clumsily added as a ‘compromise’ against a blanket boycott. So what? It doesn’t make it any less anti-semitic in its consequences.

The boycott campaign was always reluctant to say what kind of bureaucracy it was in favour of setting up to oversee exceptions on political grounds. In the steadfast absence of such a proposal, it is reasonable to assume that the idea was that the decent people who were implementing the boycott would simply know who should be made an exception to the exclusion. It seems unlikely that a boycott with a political test, therefore, would have been implemented against non-Jews or against anti-Zionist Jews at Israeli universities. The boundary might have been drawn in a particularly haphazard way, on a case by case basis.¹⁰⁸

The political test would have functioned as a net with which to catch Israeli ‘Zionists’ and would have been based on the assumption that being a ‘Zionist’ is not compatible with being a decent, ethical academic. One logical extension, which the Natfhe motion allowed, although presumably through bad drafting more than through design, was the possibility of extending the campaign against ‘Zionist’ academics outside Israel. If the principle is established that we don’t do business with Israeli Zionists, then some may be tempted to extend the reach of the boycott to ‘Zionists’ who happen to work outside of Israel. This prospect is less remote when we remember that there have been campaigns to ‘no platform’ ‘Zionists’ as though they were racists, from student unions; also when

¹⁰⁸ The political test has echoes of the designation of the ‘exceptional Jew’ that was part and parcel of most antisemitic parties prior to the development of Nazism

we remember that a boycott policy would not always be implemented by people as sophisticated as the antiracists who run the boycott campaign.

An academic who comes originally from Poland and who now lives and works in the UK, said that the rhetoric of the boycotters reminded him of events in Poland in March 1968, the year following the beginning of the Israeli occupation. Under the cover of solidarity with Palestinians and using the rhetoric of anti-Zionism, the Polish state had purged the Jewish intelligentsia. Jewish intellectuals were challenged to declare themselves anti-Zionist. Most of them refused, and many left the country; Poland lost a large number of its thinkers, teachers, writers, and researchers. For this individual at least, the current boycott proposals resonated strongly with echoes of older antisemitic campaigns.¹⁰⁹

(b) Institutional Boycott

The political test, therefore, tends to create more problems for the boycott campaign than it solves. Another way around the problem, then, is to sacrifice the ‘exceptional Israelis’; exceptional Israelis being defined by the set of Israelis who will, anyway, be happy to make the sacrifice, and to argue for an ‘institutional boycott’.

This is an attempt to de-personalize the issue. It is an attempt to make it more difficult for opponents to characterize the boycott as a campaign against Israeli Jews or as an exclusion from campuses, journals or conferences. It becomes a campaign against institutions and not against individuals. Israeli individuals will continue to be welcome members of the academic community so long as they do not appear in the name of their institutions, are not funded by their institutions, and do not attempt to host events at their institutions.

Jon Pike’s (2006a) rebuttal of this institutional turn makes two central points. Firstly, it is rare for academic institutions to produce research outputs; papers are written by individuals, presentations are made by individuals, conferences are attended by individuals. So, he argues, the reality of an institutional boycott would still be an exclusion of individuals. Further, in an argument reminiscent of one against the political

¹⁰⁹ Personal correspondence with the author – 13 May 2005, 16 May 2005.

test, he asks how the distinction between institutions and individuals will actually be made in practice:

[The] covert boycott (a ‘quiet stand’ according to BRICUP) is, of course, denuded of a political message. But also, there is no mechanism of accountability for their actions. They claim that there is a difference between an institutional boycott and an individual boycott, and I think that there’s no difference. But we won’t be able to know whether or not there is an operable distinction, because the operation is now conducted in secret. We won’t be able to know whether people engage in Wilkie type actions (without the incriminating email). And I guess, the boycotters who think it’s OK to adopt an ‘institutional’ rather than an ‘individual’ boycott simply think we should trust them on that one. (Pike 2006a)

Sue Blackwell, an outspoken supporter of the boycott campaign has threatened to sue people involved in *Engage* for defamation, because they wrote that she is an ‘outspoken supporter of the campaign to exclude Israeli academics from UK campuses’. She responded:

...you know very well that while I am certainly an outspoken supporter of the campaign to boycott Israeli institutions, I have NEVER campaigned to ‘exclude Israeli academics from UK campuses.

Interestingly, she goes on to admit that such a campaign would indeed, be illegal:

Considering that such an action would be illegal (discrimination on the grounds of nationality) and that you are thereby accusing me of advocating a course of action which would be in breach of the law, I consider your remark defamatory.

Blackwell was referring to an email from Jon Pike which publicly made an analogy between a case of institutional discrimination at Birmingham University, where the closure of courses had impacted disproportionately on ethnic minority staff, and Blackwell’s proposed ‘institutional’ boycott, which, he argued, would also act disproportionately against Israelis and against Jews. So is it reasonable to describe Sue Blackwell as ‘an outspoken supporter of the campaign to exclude Israeli academics from UK campuses’ when she claims that she is only for boycott of Israeli institutions, not for a boycott of any human beings?

Sue Blackwell has supported campaigns for exclusions of individual Israeli academics from global academia. Blackwell carries on her website¹¹⁰ a number of articles about, and by, both Andrew Wilkie (Layfield 2003) and Mona Baker¹¹¹, under the title ‘Academic

¹¹⁰ <http://www.sue.be/pal/academic/boycott.html>

¹¹¹ <http://www.monabaker.com/personalstatement.htm>

and cultural boycott of Israel, divestment etc.’ It is already clear that Blackwell understands the actions of these two people, who did want exclude individual Israelis, one from his campus and the other from her journal, as being part of the general campaign which she supports. In another part of her website¹¹² Blackwell outlines her tactical disagreement with Mona Baker as follows:

...I try to draw a distinction between institutions and individuals: the target is the Israeli government, not ordinary citizens. Of course it’s a slippery distinction, as Mona Baker herself points out: in fact it’s impossible to boycott an institution without in some way affecting the individuals who work for it. I take her point, but nonetheless I try not to target individuals as far as possible. So I draw the line in a different place from Mona; all the same I respect her right to draw her own line where her conscience tells her to, and I think the witch-hunt against her is disgusting.

Blackwell is very clear. The ‘institutional boycott’ does affect individuals, the distinction is ‘slippery’ and impossible to maintain clearly in the real world, and an ‘institutional boycott’ does exclude individual Israeli academics. Blackwell is also clear that she sees herself as being part of the same campaign as Mona Baker (i.e. the campaign to exclude Israeli individuals from UK campuses, journals, conferences) and that she supports Baker against the ‘disgusting’ ‘witch-hunt’ which was the response to Baker’s exclusion of individuals. Now Blackwell admits that the sacking of individuals because of their nationality ‘would be illegal (discrimination on the grounds of nationality)’. At the time when Baker was sacking Israelis, she called the angry response to the discrimination a ‘witch-hunt’. Blackwell says that she supports only an ‘institutional’ boycott. But when somebody sacks individuals because they are Israeli, she supports them.

Blackwell then goes on to explain that she believes Baker’s exclusion of Israeli individuals does, anyway, constitute only an ‘institutional boycott’:

She is not boycotting all Israeli academics, let alone all Jewish academics; she is boycotting people who are employed by Israeli institutions, whatever their nationality, ethnicity or religion.

In 2005 Blackwell supported the AUT motion which proposed the exclusion of academics from global academia who worked at three Israeli institutions. ‘Conscientious Israeli academics and intellectuals opposed to their state’s colonial and racist policies’ were to be recognized as exceptional and excused from the boycott – the political test is a weapon aimed at individuals, not at institutions. It is true that Blackwell is not for the

¹¹² <http://www.sue.be/pal/FAQs.html>

exclusion of *all* Israeli academics – only the ones who work in Israel; and it is true that she is not for the exclusion of *only* Israeli academics – she says that she is for the exclusion of any academic who is connected to an Israeli institution. Although it is difficult to imagine a Palestinian or Arab academic, with an institutional affiliation to an Israeli university, being targeted by the boycott campaign in the UK. They may well be targeted by the boycotters in Palestine, as collaborators, but that is a different issue.

In defending herself against the charge of promoting a policy that is racist in effect if not in intent, a policy that in reality would exclude Israeli Jewish academics vastly more than anybody else, she does not make a convincing case. Which is where this discussion started – Blackwell showed herself to understand full well the concept of unintended or institutional racism against black and other minority staff at her own university, but she rejects the same way of thinking if it involves the unintended or institutional exclusion of Israelis or Jews.

(c) Academic Freedom

The standard liberal argument against a boycott of Israeli academia is based on the principle that such a boycott would violate the norms of academic freedom. Blakemore *et al* (2003) published a general articulation of this argument against scientific boycotts¹¹³ in *Nature*, arguing that such a boycott would be illegitimate except for in the most extreme cases. Michael Yudkin (2007), one of the authors of the *Nature* article updated the argument in 2007, broadening it out to cover academic boycott in general rather than just scientific, and also focusing it on the question of Israel in particular. He argues:

The principle of the Universality of Science and Learning – that academics do not discriminate against colleagues on the basis of factors that are irrelevant to their academic work (such as race, religion, nationality etc.) – is well established and almost universally respected. To boycott academics by reason of their country of residence breaches this principle and harms the interests of the academics concerned.

¹¹³ Two prestigious scientific journals have recently opened ‘debates’ on whether to exclude Israelis. New Scientist did so with an editorial on 9 June 2007 entitled ‘Should scientists boycott Israel?’ and the British Medical Journal did so with pieces for and against the boycott in its 21 July 2007 issue.

In this article Yudkin goes beyond a straightforward defence of academic freedom to challenge a number of the arguments put forward by those who support an academic boycott of Israel.

Howard Jacobson (2007) tells that a supporter of the boycott campaign wrote to him denying that they threatened the academic freedom of Israelis. He was not in favour of gagging or silencing Israeli voices but merely of refusing to listen to them. Jacobson argues that refusing to listen, closing your ears, is not primarily an act of violence against the speaker but is in the first place an act of violence against oneself:

To say you intend knowingly and purposefully and on principle ‘not to listen’ is to say you are waging a sort of war on your own faculties, because listening, if you are a reasoning person, is chief among the tools you reason with..... Most of what Socrates did was listen. No longer to listen is no longer to engage in the dialogue of thought. Which disqualifies you as a scholar and a teacher, for what sort of example to his pupils is a teacher who covers truth’s ears and buries it under stone. A university that will not listen does far more intellectual damage to itself than to the university it has stopped listening to. (Jacobson 2007)

Anthony Julius and Alan Dershowitz (2007) make the same point in a different way:

...freedom of expression must incorporate freedom of address. It is not sufficient for my freedom of expression for me simply to be free to speak. What matters to me is that people should also be free to hear me. There should at least be the possibility of dialogue. Boycotts put a barrier in front of the speaker. He can speak but he is prevented from communicating. When he addresses another, that other turns away.

The point here is that the harm of the academic boycott begins at home. The boycott intends to harm Israeli universities and it may or may not, in the end, succeed in this aspiration. But it definitely and immediately harms the universities doing the boycotting or the universities in which the campaign for the exclusion of academic colleagues rages. In hosting the false claim that Israeli universities are not genuine universities and should be shunned, British universities face the danger that their own status as universities will be degraded.

When challenged about why Israeli academics are singled out for punishment while academics in other human rights abusing states are not, many boycotters respond that they would also support boycotts against the other states if somebody was to organize them and if the oppressed in those states were to call for it. It is true that if there were boycotts of academics in all states which abuse human rights as much as, or more than

Israel, then the academic boycott would no longer be effectively antisemitic. It would, however, indicate the end of the academic project and the end of the university. The aspiration to international scholarly and scientific co-operation would be rendered vain.

Judith Butler (2006) argues that a liberal abstract notion of academic freedom is not sufficient to make sense of the boycott debate. While Palestinian academics and students may enjoy an abstract right to academic freedom, the material conditions necessary for the enjoyment of those rights do not exist under occupation, she argues:

[S]tudents and faculty at institutions on the West Bank are regularly stopped at checkpoints and fail to get to class; they are often without fundamental material support for schooling, even lacking classrooms and basic supplies, and are subject to sudden closures that make the idea of a completed ‘semester’ almost unthinkable. Indeed, substantive notions of freedom of ‘movement’ and freedom of ‘communication’ are systematically undermined under such conditions.

Many who argue for an academic boycott of Israel say that it is hypocritical for Israelis to insist on their own right to academic freedom while their state denies such freedom to Palestinians. Or as Steven Rose put it in a debate at Goldsmiths College UCU on 27 September 2006, Israelis are hypocritical to ‘squeal’ about their own academic freedom while the occupation continues to deny freedom to Palestinians. It should be noted here that this way of thinking risks setting the precedent that academics should be held responsible, and punished, for the policies of the government or state in which they work. Yet Butler is right to argue that academic freedom is severely limited in the occupied territories, not by a denial of the abstract right, but by the occupation, which renders academic freedom materially extremely difficult to realize. This is true even if it is one-sided since the universities of Palestine were also founded under Israeli occupation and did not exist before the Israeli occupation. There is a problem of academic freedom in Palestine. It is possible to respond to this by arbitrarily and artificially removing the academic freedom of Israelis, as punishment, in order to balance the situation, or in an effort to exert pressure on Israel to respect Palestinian freedom. Or it is possible to respond to this by campaigning against the occupation and against the material denials of academic freedom which come with it. Butler does not argue that abstract academic freedom may be trumped by other more important rights, but the opposite:

... I do not mean to say that we cannot invoke academic freedom in the abstract to show its absence in certain political conditions: we can and we must. But it makes no sense to value the doctrine in the abstract if we cannot call for its implementation.

Butler is not arguing that one should balance an absence of material freedom in Palestine by regarding academic freedom in Israel to be unimportant; she argues that the principle of abstract freedom must be strengthened and deepened, made material by creating the conditions for its implementation.¹¹⁴

This is an old theme in radical and Marxist thought and it is perhaps a central indicator of the most important schism in that tradition, the one which divides totalitarian thought and politics from the politics and philosophy of self-liberation. The totalitarian traditions fight for uncompromising critiques of abstract right; they hold law, democracy, freedom of speech and human rights to be worse than useless to the disempowered. Formal equality is, in these traditions, nothing but the form of rule of power. It hides illegitimate exploitation behind an ideology of fairness, behind the American dream. Men dominate women through the phallocentric notion of abstract equality; the bourgeoisie rules over the poor and exploited through the class-ridden hypocrisy of equality before the law; imperialist states legitimize their wars of interest with the cry of human rights. This is the *really* radical tradition; not only does it see bourgeois rights as being promised but denied to the majority; it sees bourgeois rights as the very form of rule of illegitimate power.

Marx himself was entirely explicit in his own critique of this vulgar and dangerous ‘Marxism’. In *On the Jewish Question*, (1994) he defended bourgeois rights – in this case the right to religious freedom for Jews – uncompromisingly against an argument which offered a much more ‘radical’ critique of society. Against Bruno Bauer, who argued that Jews did not need religious freedom but really needed to free themselves of

¹¹⁴ Butler (2006) also makes this remarkable claim: ‘... many of the Israelis most vocal in their opposition to the Occupation, such as Ilan Pappe, were also those who were saying ‘boycott me!’’ This claim is wrong in two ways. Firstly there it is not true to say that ‘many’ of the most vocal Israeli opponents of the Occupation support the boycott – in truth only a handful of vocal Israeli opponents of the Occupation oppose the boycott. Secondly it is misleading to characterize Pappe as being an opponent of the Occupation since he does not distinguish between the Occupation and the rest of Israel; he believes it all to be illegitimately occupied territory.

their religion, Marx argued for a framework which takes rights seriously but which is not satisfied with their purely abstract nature in society as it exists. Far from seeing rights as something unimportant or positively dangerous, Marx's position was that radicals should fight for rights and should fight to extend them beyond the purely abstract. His was a project of making rights real for all, not one of scoffing at those who 'squeal' about their rights.¹¹⁵

The boycott campaign sees academic freedom in Israel and throughout the globe as being something which may be legitimately sacrificed for the greater good of ending the occupation; academic freedom, they argue, is part of the ideological armoury brought to bear against those who fight the occupation. I would argue the opposite. The concept of academic freedom is important in itself but it does not go far enough; a material conception of academic freedom is necessary to go beyond the critique of the boycott all the way to a fight for freedom in the West Bank. Academic freedom is not a principle which we should reject because sometimes it fails to deliver what it promises; rather, we should fight to hold it to its promise.

(d) Damage to UCU

As the violence done to the principle of academic freedom is felt first in the boycotting university, so does antisemitism strike first there too. The boycott is not caused or motivated by an underlying antisemitism but is itself a cause or a catalyst or a license for antisemitism to emerge; it is also, itself, an antisemitic policy. The boycott 'debate' launches the boycotters into a fight against the vast majority of Jews who oppose their campaign to exclude Israelis and who experience their campaign as an antisemitic attack. True, many boycotters are Jews, but not many Jews are boycotters. No matter how often and how loudly Jewish boycotters speak '*as Jews*', no matter how hard they struggle to neutralize antisemitism as an issue in the 'debate', no matter how desperately they insist that the Jewish community is split on the issue, they do not succeed; the Jewish community is not really split and antisemitism *is* an issue in the 'debate'.

¹¹⁵ See Robert Fine (2006) who argues that those who read Marx himself as an antisemite are quite wrong.

So the appearance of the campaign to exclude Israelis from our campuses brings with it a toxic atmosphere. People who oppose the boycott are portrayed as pro-imperialist, pro-Zionist, pro-apartheid, uncaring of Palestinian suffering, supporters of the occupation and users of the charge of antisemitism as a dishonest smoke screen. And most of the people thus accused are Jews. With the campaign to exclude Israelis comes a campaign to libel Jewish academics and Jewish union members; Jewish students too. Not all Israelis are to be excluded; not all Jews are to be libeled; not all those to be excluded are Jews; not all those who are libeled are Jews; but Nazism was an unusual and exceptional antisemitism insofar as it allowed no exceptions, no exceptional Jews, no good Jews.

The boycott campaign threatens the principle of the university and it also threatens the principle of the trades union. It is not a coincidence that many of those who consider themselves to be on the left of the trade union movement are pushing this campaign against Israelis at a moment when trade unions have never been less able to deliver on their core business. UCU is supposed to fight for the pay and conditions of people who work in universities and colleges and it is supposed to fight for the principle of education in Britain. For those who have raised ‘anti-imperialism’ far above all other radical principles, the fact that the union is unable to win on bread and butter trade union issues is less important than the project of joining in the global struggle against imperialism alongside the ‘resistance’ in Iraq, Hamas and Hezbollah, with Chavez, Castro and Ahmadinejad.

At the same Bournemouth conference which passed the motion to support the campaign for an academic boycott of Israel, another motion was passed which illustrates this point clearly. An amendment was proposed to add the following text to the motion opposing the war in Iraq:

The various so-called resistance forces have regularly killed trade union, women’s and LGBT activists. The ‘resistance’ groups - various types of Ba’athist-fascist and Islamist organisation - are unremittingly hostile to the new labour movement.

This text was removed and replaced with the following:

The 650,000+ excess civilian deaths in Iraq since 2003 and the destruction of civil society, including the attacks on trade unionists, women and LGBT people, derive directly from the

presence of occupying US and UK forces - practically, morally and legally under the Geneva Conventions.

A stark illustration of the importance of this political disagreement was provided by Hamas, who on 18 July 2007, looted and smashed up the Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions office in Gaza and summoned trades unionists for ‘interrogation’.¹¹⁶

UCU still represents university and college staff on national pay-scales and in national negotiations. This is an achievement which is under threat. The elite universities, the Russell Group, would like to break away from this framework, pay their elite staff better, and let the rest of the sector sink or change from being universities into being feeder schools for postgraduate study at research-active institutions. In 2006 university staff was involved in ‘action short of a strike’ in pursuit of a pay claim. This campaign ended inconclusively when unity began to crumble under pressure. The employers settled for a small increase in pay and the union came out of the action in tact and with national bargaining still in place.

The context of the boycott ‘debate’ is a union where unity is crucial to the achievement of its core aims; a moment when trade union unity might mean the difference between a national education system and a completely marketized system; a moment when the very existence of a union which represents all college workers is under threat. This is the moment that the pro-boycott ‘left’ chooses to divide the union between those who know how to recognize the smell of antisemitism and those who can’t recognize it or who refuse to sniff the air.

In 2005, when AUT had a policy of boycotting Haifa and Bar-Ilan, and there was a possibility of boycotting Hebrew University Jerusalem too, there were a number of serious legal threats to the union. Given that much of the pretext for these boycotts were false, then AUT was in a position where it was spreading libel against globally respected academic institutions. Anthony Julius, who had successfully represented Deborah Lipstadt against Holocaust denier David Irving, represented Both Haifa and Hebrew

¹¹⁶ <http://www.engageonline.org.uk/blog/article.php?id=1271> downloaded 25 July 2007.

Universities. Julius wrote to the AUT threatening legal action for defamation.¹¹⁷ These kinds of threats, given the archaic legal framework governing defamation law in England, were threats which may have bankrupted the union. Some trade unionists argue that it is illegitimate to threaten legal action in a trade union dispute, to run to the ‘bourgeois’ courts to settle a labour movement dispute; but it seems clear enough that trade unions have a legal duty not to push defamatory claims about entirely respectable universities, and those universities have every right to defend themselves by legal means.

Many UCU members have resigned from the union over its support for the boycott. Many, like Shalom Lappin, have done so openly and have given their reasons publicly;¹¹⁸ it is likely that many others have simply stopped paying their dues, forgotten to renew their membership, or decided not to join in the first place. In these ways, Jews and antiracists (people who oppose antisemitism) are being pushed out of the UCU. Shalom Lappin is a serious left Zionist, a person whose adult life has been spent fighting for peace between Israel and Palestine, fighting for workers’ rights through trade unions, fighting for political change through authentic social democratic politics. Lappin has had enough of standing in the dock within UCU and defending the right of our Israeli colleagues to be treated as human beings by us. Nobody else needs such a defence. He argues that the debate about whether to exclude Israelis is illegitimate - in the same way that a debate over whether or not the Holocaust happened is illegitimate, or a debate about whether women have souls. He refuses to legitimate such a debate by taking part or by remaining in a union where such a debate is raging.

The sections of the ‘left’ which ceaselessly push the boycott debate, which responds to defeats by pushing it once more, which treats the campaign to boycott Israel as though it were the most important political task in the world, are risking the very future of the union.

(e) Damage to Palestine

¹¹⁷ The letter to Haifa is available here: http://boycottnews.haifa.ac.il/html/html_eng/AUT.pdf. The letter to Hebrew University is available here: <http://www.engageonline.org.uk/archives/index.php?id=46>

¹¹⁸ http://normblog.typepad.com/normblog/2007/06/responding_to_t.html and http://normblog.typepad.com/normblog/2007/06/why_ive_resigne.html

Palestine is in crisis. Hamas won a parliamentary election and made a successful coup against the Palestinian presidency in Gaza. The occupation is intensifying, the wall is being completed, the checkpoints are as numerous and humiliating as ever; the Israeli settlements are growing and multiplying.

In Britain in 2007 the Palestine solidarity movement re-branded itself by building a new broad organization called the ‘Enough Coalition’. Many legitimate civil society organizations have signed up to this coalition, such as the charity ‘War on Want’, the green pressure group ‘Friends of the Earth’, the Transport and General Workers Union and Amicus (now merged into UNITE) and the public service workers union, UNISON. The Enough Coalition calls itself ‘a campaign for a just peace for all people in Israel and Palestine’¹¹⁹ yet while presenting itself as a coalition against the occupation, it fails to affirm Israel’s right to exist within the pre-1967 borders. Indeed it clearly implies, in its mission statement,¹²⁰ that the descendants of the 1948 refugees should be ‘allowed home’, a demand which is incompatible with a two state solution to the conflict between Israel and Palestine.

Even after this re-branding exercise, even while riding the wave of the media discussion focused around the 40th anniversary of the occupation, even during the summer in which much of the trade union movement has backed a boycott of Israel, even when the situation in Palestine continues to be desperate, the Palestine solidarity movement was unable to build mass support for its showpiece demonstration on 9 June 2007. ‘Enough’ claim that there were 20,000 people there while other estimates are as low as 2,000¹²¹. Even if there were as many as ten or twenty thousand were present, this represents a failure to broaden the movement from the narrow activist core into a mass protest reminiscent of those against apartheid South Africa in the 1980s which attracted hundreds of thousands of marchers.

One hypothesis is that ‘ordinary people’ who have sympathy with the plight of the Palestinians are still put off these demonstrations by the smell of antisemitism that swirls

¹¹⁹ <http://www.enoughoccupation.org/?lid=13695>

¹²⁰ <http://www.enoughoccupation.org/Mission%20Statement%2013810.twl>

¹²¹

<http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?cid=1181228582339&pagename=JPost%2FJPArticle%2FShowFull>

around them. A number of groups which speak '*as Jews*' were there, hoping that their presence would demonstrate that at least some Jews should not be hated for their 'Zionism': Jewish Socialist Group, Jews Against Zionism, Jews for Boycotting Israeli Goods, Jews for Justice for Palestinians. Yet the usual sprinkling of antisemitic placards was also present; George Galloway, who says that Jews are foreigners in Jerusalem, called for a boycott of Israel from the platform; the leader of the antisemitic Hamas movement in Palestine, Ismail Haniyeh, spoke via video link to the rally.

Within the trade unions, the boycott 'debate' is not between those who support Israel and those who support Palestine, nor is it between Jews and Muslims. It is in fact almost entirely a debate amongst people who say that they support freedom for Palestinians. Some boycotters allege that anti-boycotters are lying when they say they support a Palestinian state; some anti-boycotters notice that many of the boycotters support the military conquest of Israel by Hamas and Hezbollah, an eventuality which they doubt would result in any kind of freedom either for Palestinians or for Israelis. But the overwhelming majority of those on both sides of the 'debate' hopes for a just peace and for freedom for Palestinians. But the boycott campaign splits in half those who support a just peace and who want to oppose the occupation. Discussion of Palestine and Israel has been almost entirely displaced by the completely different discussion about whether Israelis should be excluded from the cultural and economic life of the planet. The Palestine Solidarity Campaign has, for the last 5 years at least, been a campaign for the boycott of Israel and for the de-legitimization of Israel.

A political goal of the boycott campaign is to have its own definition of a 'friend of Palestine' adopted as left common sense. It defines a friend of Palestine as somebody who supports a boycott of Israelis and it defines an enemy of Palestine as somebody who opposes a boycott of Israelis. So a whole layer of people who think of themselves as friends of Palestine, who work towards an end of the occupation, who support the peace movements in Israel and in Palestine, who oppose racism in both Israel and Palestine – these people are treated by the boycott campaign as enemies of Palestinians. In this way, the boycott campaign splits and disables Palestine solidarity work in Britain. In this way, the boycott campaign damages Palestine.

(f) Inconsistency: why boycott only Israel when there are many more serious human rights abusers on the planet

A question which is often the first one to occur to somebody when they learn that there is a campaign to boycott Israel, is to ask ‘Why Israel?’ There is genocide going on in Darfur as I write, and it has killed hundreds of thousands of people, as well as causing the death of hundreds of thousands more of the millions who have been displaced. There is a dictatorship ruling Zimbabwe which fails to feed its population and which has organized hundreds of thousands of house demolitions in the last few years. China has been running a bloody and repressive occupation of Tibet for decades, has moved millions of its own settlers into Tibet and has deported hundreds of thousands of Tibetans to the Laogai camps, the Chinese version of the Gulag. Russia is running an occupation of Chechnya which has resulted in the deaths of countless thousands of Chechens, particularly during its re-conquest of Grozny, the capital city, in the mid 1990s. There are very many states in the world where there are ethnic or gendered exclusions from citizenship, or systems of two-class citizenship, or systems whereby many of the people who do the work are non-citizens or guest-workers. There are very many states in the world which came into being following ethnic struggles over territory and the forced movement of populations. There are many states in the world which are still fighting over pieces of territory with their neighbours. There are many states in the world where there is no freedom of the press, freedom of speech, no functioning legal system. There are many places where trade unions and political parties are illegal and repressed. There are many places where there is no democracy. So, why, in British trade unions and the pages of *The Guardian* and *The Independent*, why on British campuses and in the British left intelligentsia, are there campaigns only to punish Israel? Norman Geras (2005a) notices that the boycotters and the blacklisters

all assure us that this isn’t about blank prejudice. It’s about human rights, racism and what have you, and Israel just happens to be the privileged exemplar. But when you ask for a principled reason which picks out Israel, and Israel exclusively, not only can the boycotters and blacklisters not give one satisfactory reason, they don’t even converge on a *common* reason. Now it’s supposedly because they were called upon by Palestinian organizations. Now it’s because no one has yet brought a resolution to the AUT on China, or Sudan, or Chechnya, or Iran, or Zimbabwe, or Iraq (in Saddam’s day), or the US (since then). Or else Israel *isn’t* a special case, but it is a case

... ; and it's good enough if it's a case; and this just happens to be the case we're focusing on. Or it's because of illegal occupation, or because of UN resolutions. Or it's because of racism, like with apartheid (or, *sotto voce*, and sometimes not so *sotto voce*, like with Nazi Germany). ... But for want of decent reasons, the boycotters have something unfortunately as powerful; and this is a fixed hostility towards the State of Israel.

Richard Kuper (2006) finds a number of reasons to single out Israel for particular criticism although it should be noted that we are more interested here in reasons for singling out Israel for unique punishment than for ‘criticism’. Anyone may be criticized on particular grounds, but if someone is to be the only one punished then this must be because they are the only one worthy of punishment. Kuper admits that ‘other states in the Middle East, such as Saudi Arabia or Iraq under Saddam Hussein, have been far greater violators of human rights’ but he goes on to offer four reasons why Israel is ‘legitimately singled out’.

First, Israel should not be judged against other states in the world but ‘in terms of its own founding principles’. So Kuper proposes that it is reasonable to judge Israel as a ‘light unto nations’ and as a democratic state. Theological debate is beyond my competency (and beyond Kuper’s too, I suspect), but it seems to me extremely threatening to imply that Israel should deserve unique punishment if it is judged to have failed to be the most moral and the best behaved state in the world (a light unto nations). Similarly the idea that Israel should be punished if it fails to live up to the promise of democracy, while states which are not democratic should not be so punished has little to recommend it. This argument in fact, is one which holds the crime of hypocrisy to be the greatest crime imaginable, worse than genocide. But anyway, does Kuper really imagine that the official narrative of Israeli nationalism is the only one to make rather overblown claims? Does he imagine that North Korea should be judged not against international human rights and humanitarian norms, but according to how it fails to be the socialist paradise on earth which is constitutionally bound to be?

Second, Kuper suggests that Israel should be judged according to different criteria than other states because it has, within its territory, a number of sites which are of special significance to Christians, Jews and Muslims worldwide. The claim here seems to be that the presence of such sites means that Israel’s record on human rights abuses should be judged differently to that of other states. But Kuper does not go on to discuss how this

principle of holding states with religious sites to different human rights standards would impact on other states which are the home to religious sites, such as Saudi Arabia.

Third, Israel is singled out by the USA for a particularly strong alliance. But Kuper does not explain why this fact should cause people concerned about human rights abuses to be more concerned about Israeli human rights abuses. Presumably this argument boils down to a charge of hypocrisy, this time leveled against the USA.

Fourth, Israel claims to be not just a state for its citizens, says Kuper, but also a state for all Jews. It exaggerates the danger of antisemitism in order to encourage Jews to identify with Israel and it implicitly makes a charge against Jews who are critical of some of its policies, of disloyalty. Kuper inverts the real situation here. Israel is open to all Jews for historical reasons connected to its birth following a serious outbreak of antisemitism in Europe; following the expulsion of Jews from the states of the Middle East; following the long experience of Russian antisemitism. Israel has been a refuge from antisemitism; it is one of the rather sad myths of anti-Zionism that Israel benefits from, invents, exaggerates and provokes antisemitism in order to encourage Jewish immigration.

It is true that any individual has every right to be concerned about whatever particular cause happens to engage them. But a trade union has a duty not to act whimsically or arbitrarily but consistently. A trade union should be concerned with human rights abuses and it should try to do something about human rights abuses. It should not be concerned with and try to punish only one small set of human rights abuses.

When you get pulled over to the side of the road for speeding and you stand with the self-righteous police officer while he is writing out the ticket, and you watch the succession of other cars driving past at the same speed you were doing, you are likely to experience a feeling of injustice. It is not, in truth, unjust. You were breaking the law, and you have been caught. In the long run, most of the others will eventually be caught and punished too, if they carry on driving at that speed. But the boycott of Israel is not like this. The boycott would punish speeders, but not speeders at random and not every speeder. The boycott would punish nearly all Jewish speeders. It would find reasons to be much more

concerned to punish Jewish speeders than any others. Many reasons would be proposed, and none of them would appear to be antisemitic.

Many nineteenth century socialists opposed capitalism; some of them singled out ‘Jewish capitalism’ for particular attention. Many people oppose street crime; some single out black muggers for particular attention. Many people oppose religious bigotry; some single out Islam for particular attention. Even then, it is possible and perhaps necessary to have a reasoned discussion about the relationship between Jews and capitalism, about the relationship between black kids and street crime and about the relationship between homophobia and Islam. But it is also possible for these relationships to function at the heart of a racist commonsense; possible and likely.

(g) Universities as particular targets of the boycott campaign

There are two strands to the argument about why academics in particular should be boycotted. One is that there should be a general boycott of Israel and as part of that, academics around the world should boycott Israeli academics. The other is that Israeli academic institutions are themselves guilty, or particularly guilty, of facilitating, turning a blind eye to, legitimating and providing personnel for, Israeli human rights abuses. The boycott campaign continues to recycle a number of libels and half truths about Israeli academia. These are effective with an audience that knows little about Israel and less about Israeli universities. Both Haifa University and the Hebrew University have about 20% Arab students as well as significant numbers of Arab faculty members. This is a rate of inclusion of minorities which would shame many elite British institutions. Another common misrepresentations is that ‘Israeli academics as a community - with some brave exceptions - are at best silent and at worst open in their advocacy’ (Rose 2006) of Israel’s immoral and illegal acts. The truth is that the universities are spaces in Israel where conflict is pursued through words and ideas rather than guns and bombs. They are amongst the most antiracist spaces in Israel; spaces where ideas for peace are forged, taught and practiced.

Some academics will indeed be rightwing; some may be profoundly reactionary. That is the nature of an open, democratic and free education system. It is a system that also

guarantees a safe, tenured chair for the extreme anti-Zionist Ilan Pappe, even when he calls upon the world to boycott his own colleagues and his own institution.

There is a list of names of hundreds of Israeli academics¹²², hardly brave exceptions, who publicly support those of their students who refuse to serve in the Israeli army in the occupied territories. The Oslo peace process, destroyed by Israeli and Arab extremists, was forged by links between Israeli and Palestinian academics. Certainly there are institutional and other connections between Israeli universities and the armed forces and the defence industries; this is standard throughout the world. In many states, universities are state controlled institutions. In Israel, as in most democratic states, they are formally, and to a large extent actually, independent institutions.

One precedent that the boycott campaign seems to set is that academics (and musicians and artists and sportspeople) should be held responsible and should be punished by exclusion, for the human rights abuses committed by their state. This kind of collective responsibility is not the usual attitude taken by left and liberal critics of state human rights abuses.

(h) Antisemitism

The political culture in which the boycott ‘debate’ takes place is extremely poor and political education is often lacking. The debate which takes place on the UCU activist email list is astonishing. One UCU colleague wrote: ‘I have a big problem with this ‘right to exist’ business’, as though Israeli sovereignty was an impertinence. Somebody else admits that the boycott ‘could qualify as indirect race discrimination’ but argues that this is necessary for the greater good. Another manufactures a difference between antisemitism and ‘antisemitism’, and pleads guilty to the second because he defines it as ‘objecting to the policies of Israel’. Or: ‘Why should Israel’s legacy of horror and trauma be exploited to deprive the Palestinians ... their homeland? Just how long can the history of antisemitism and the holocaust be used ... to exempt Israel?’ One colleague wrote the following:

¹²² http://www.seruv.org.il/UniversitySupportEng_Print.asp

What security is Israel entitled to? To non-hypocrites, the answer is obvious. The same security it gives Palestine, no more, no less. On its current record, then, Israel has no right to exist and its people must be conquered, partially expelled and brutalised by Occupation. (21 September 2007)

Another wrote:

The whole Israeli education system - from nursery to university - is embedded in the Israeli obsession with war as some sort of 'defence' against who knows what ... The minute I tried to probe the fears of the Israelis I met the conversation moved into something that I can only describe as a dreadful mix of possibly real and totally unreal anxieties about Europe in the past, Biblical history, contemporary Judaism, work, land and the American dream ... These conversations were a gush of insecure and often irrational stuff that I tried to understand. But I could not. (19 September 2007)

This colleague went on to write the following:

But at one point we as a union are going to have to some eyeball to eyeball stuff with our counterparts in Israel and the message has to be got over that the occupation has to end ... if Israeli academics think otherwise then let them say so in the international press ... Lets tease them out ! (23 September 2007)

Often a swirl of discourse can mix together different kinds of expression, from tacky rambling, to sharp criticism which merits serious responses, to clear antisemitism, to playground insults. When different voices allow what they say to coalesce into an indistinguishable swirl it is difficult to hear the whole as anything other than demonization. The union has threatened anyone who publishes any of these emails with exclusion from the list. This protects the privacy of those who are employing language and arguments which lay the foundation for antisemitic ways of thinking. UCU has a policy against antisemitism to which members can appeal. But UCU says that 'criticism of Israel cannot be construed as antisemitic'. This formulation protects any statement which resembles or incorporates criticism of Israel, whether it is actually antisemitic or not. In this way antisemitism was neutralized as an issue before the debate began.

The threat of the boycott campaign, is not abstract or theoretical. Antisemitic ways of thinking, and expression, are here, now, in the unions, on campus, in the media, in the public sphere. The warnings of the parliamentary inquiry on antisemitism are minimized by those who make it their business to explain away and rationalize every claim of antisemitism (Bechler 2007). Concern about antisemitism, they say, is really a dishonest neo-con smoke-screen, intended to de-legitimize criticism of Israeli human rights abuses. Stephen Walt and John Mearsheimer's book, the follow-up to the 2006 working papers,

was published in September 2007; their outriders are barking that anyone who does not want a debate about ‘Zionist’ responsibility for war is an opponent of free speech.

(i) The defeat of the boycott campaign in the UCU

On 28 September 2007, the campaign within the UCU for the exclusion of academics who work in Israel, from British academia, floundered to what seems to have been an abrupt and final defeat. The union had sought legal advice on the question of the boycott and at least two separate legal opinions were studied by the union’s Strategy and Finance Committee. Neither opinion is so far wholly in the public domain. One was written by Lord Anthony Lester, a hugely respected human rights lawyer who had been inspired to campaign for antiracism legislation in Britain during his time working in the civil rights movement in the American South in the early 1960s¹²³ and who had been influential in shaping the legislation which finally became law in the UK in the 1970s. The UCU released¹²⁴ the following excerpts from the opinion:

It would be beyond the Union’s powers and unlawful for the Union, directly or indirectly to call for or to implement a boycott by the Union and its members of any kind of Israeli universities and other academic institutions; and that the use of Union funds directly or indirectly to further such a boycott would also be unlawful....to ensure that the Union acts lawfully meetings should not be used to ascertain the level of support for such a boycott.

Paragraph 2.5 of the rules of the UCU states the following one of the ‘Aims and Objects’ of the union to be:

To oppose actively all forms of harassment, prejudice and unfair discrimination whether on the grounds of sex, race, ethnic or national origin, religion, colour, class, caring responsibilities, marital status, sexuality, disability, age, or other status or personal characteristic...¹²⁵

Given the legal advice, the Strategy and Finance Committee had no choice but decisively to end the union’s flirtation with a boycott of Israeli academia. To persist would have left

¹²³ Lord Lester (2006): ‘My involvement with the campaign for effective equality laws began in the early 1960s, when I was in the USA studying at Harvard Law School. In 1961, I saw at first hand the entrenched racism in the Deep South during the period of civil rights activism. In 1964, I returned for Amnesty International to report on racial injustice in the American South during the ‘Long Hot Summer’. When I returned, inspired by Dr Martin Luther King, I joined Dr David Pitt and others to found a civil rights organisation in Britain, the Campaign against Racial Discrimination (CARD).’

¹²⁴ E-mail from UCU to its members, 28 October 2007

¹²⁵ UCU Rules, http://www.ucu.org.uk/media/pdf/e/a/ucurules_jun07.pdf, downloaded 14 October, 2007.

the union vulnerable to lawsuits, presumably on the grounds of unfair discrimination in violation of the *Aims and Objects* of the union and /or in violation of the Race Relations Act (1976). Union trustees and members of the Strategy and Finance committee, as well as National Executive Committee members, could have found themselves held personally liable if they had ignored clear legal advice. The Strategy and Finance Committee voted unanimously to end all consideration of the boycott proposal.

Within days, a petition was being circulated and was signed by the hard-core of the boycott campaign. The petition, entitled ‘No gag on debate in UCU’ opposed a ‘deluge of media abuse and the threat of legal action’ which the union had had to face since the passing of Motion 30. The petition cast the boycotters as victims of a campaign against free speech. ‘We call on the UCU not to cave in to these outrageous legal threats of censorship.’¹²⁶ The *UCU Left* is the caucus in the union which, while it does not formally support the boycott, in fact provided the overwhelming majority of the activists for the campaign. Eventually the six *UCU Left* members of the Strategy and Finance Committee had to step in to explain to its own people why it had been necessary to vote to end union backing for the boycott ‘debate’. On 2 October 2007, the UCU circular to branches had made clear that this rhetoric about ‘gagging’ was inappropriate, by quoting another passage from Lester’s opinion:

...the Union and its members are fully entitled to exercise their right to freedom of expression, discussion and debate by considering the pros and cons of the proposed boycott, and, if so minded, to pass and publish resolutions criticising the policies of the Israeli government and its supporters and expressing support for the rights of Palestinians, withdrawal by Israel from the occupied territories, and so on.¹²⁷

On 8 October the 6 *UCU Left* members of the Strategy and Finance Committee made it clear to its own supporters that the boycott was really over:

The decision made on Friday 28th September by the Strategy and Finance Committee (SFC) was based on a discussion of the implications of the legal advice given by two QCs asked for separately by UCU and the by Trustees. That advice was clear and unequivocal: that a boycott of Israeli academic institutions and a call for such a boycott would be unlawful and therefore expenditure of money to “test support” for a boycott would also be unlawful. As has now become public knowledge through a letter to the Guardian, UCU’s QC is recognised as a leading expert on equality and human rights legislation. It would have been highly irresponsible for us to ignore such authoritative and unusually robust advice and thereby place union funds in jeopardy.

¹²⁶ Petition ‘No gag on debate in UCU’ <http://www.petitiononline.com/nogagucu/petition.html>

¹²⁷ UCU circular to branches, 2 October 2007, <http://www.engageonline.org.uk/blog/article.php?id=1443>

There will still be those who are tempted to explain the defeat by reference to a capitulation to bourgeois or Zionist power. But they will find it difficult to insist that anti-discrimination law is a mode of state repression when most people understand it as a victory, hard-won, by generations of antiracist activists. It is easy to conceive of circumstances in which a union might decide to risk all in a fight against a law which was designed to make it weaker; but anti-discrimination law was designed to make unions stronger and it was functioning in this case to make the UCU stronger, by ending the divisive campaign which made the union inhospitable to the overwhelming majority of Jewish college and university workers. There is law in place which prohibits bodies like the UCU from discriminating against Jews. There was a time when there was no legal prohibition on Jewish quotas and silent or explicit exclusions and boycotts of Jews by civil society organizations such as universities, golf-clubs and trades unions. The exclusion of Jews, it seems, is now no longer a private matter of choice for an organization; it is now illegal.

Those who were for a boycott of Israel were not for boycotting the academics in all states which abused human rights but only in Jewish states which abused human rights. It was a proposal which singled out the academics of one state for unique punishment.

There will be some people who supported the boycott campaign who will persist with their demonization and their rhetoric of powerful ‘Israel lobbies’. They will claim that well-funded lobbies defeated them; they will claim that British law or British lawyers are part of the Israel lobby; they will claim that the leadership of UCU sold out the rank and file. In truth the real rank and file of the union was mobilizing. Hundreds of UCU members had rallied to the ‘Campaign for a UCU ballot’ within a week of it being set up. Union members up and down the country were part of the *Engage* network to oppose the boycott campaign. A repeat of the AUT members’ revolt of 2005 had been imminent, where the union was rescued from the grip of a small coterie of Israel-hating activists by open debate and by the insistence of ordinary union members on having their say. Some boycotters will persist even after their boycott has been widely recognized, morally, legally and politically, as a counterproductive and racist proposal. But the majority of

UCU members will take this opportunity to rescue their union, to make it again into a union for all of its members.

(iii) Sporting and Cultural Boycott

In April 2006, West Ham United (a football club) had two Israeli players. When West Ham took their team for a few days' relaxation and training in the desert sun of Dubai, they sent their two Israelis off to Spain for a break (Adar 2006). Israeli citizens are not welcome in the United Arab Emirates. Bolton Wanderers left their Israeli player at home when they visited Dubai earlier in the season.¹²⁸ West Ham and Bolton quietly acquiesced to the racist policy of the United Arab Emirates without making a fuss.

Emirates Airlines have sponsored the new Arsenal stadium (The Emirates Stadium) in a £100m deal. Arsenal does allow Israelis to play football at the Emirates Stadium. But the Palestine Solidarity Campaign (PSC) launched a campaign against Arsenal because they also made a £350,000 advertising deal with the Israeli tourist board. Nobody opposed the lash-up between Arsenal and the United Arab Emirates - where women do not vote and where men's votes do not determine the government - and where significantly less than half of the population are deemed to be citizens of the state. The PSC urges us to contact Arsenal and to 'remind' them that Israel is a racist apartheid state (perhaps Arsenal had forgotten?). PSC also proposes to pressurize the Football Association's successful antiracist campaign, Kick It Out, to take a stand against this deal with the Israeli 'apartheid' state. The campaign to boycott South African sport focused on the fact that South African sport was 'racially' segregated. It argued that sports people from around the world should not play as normal with teams that were picked according to the principle of 'race' rather than talent. Israeli sport is not segregated because Israel is not an apartheid state.

¹²⁸ There is nothing new about sports teams bowing to the racist policies of states that they visit. The English cricketing authorities tried to find a way of leaving Basil D'Olivera, who was classified as 'coloured' by the apartheid regime, at home when they were due to tour South Africa in 1970. In the end they were forced to cancel the tour rather than bow to the South African government who wanted to choose who could play cricket for England.

In 2001, the UN organized a global conference against racism in Durban, with a parallel conference for Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs). The anti-Israel enthusiasts prevented both of these global conferences from doing anything useful about racism anywhere in the world. They did this by insisting that the greatest manifestation of racism in the world was ‘Zionism’. They took over both of these conferences and used them to denounce Israel as racist and apartheid - and to insist that everyone else also denounce Israel. One result was that nothing useful came out of either of these conferences on anti-racism. Now the PSC risked destroying the successful Kick It Out Campaign in a similar way.

Footballer John Barnes, who knows what it is like to face 40,000 people making monkey noises at him because he is black, clearly did not think that Kick It Out should be derailed in this way. He visited Israel in March 2006 (Giver 2006) where he helped to launch Israel’s version of the Kick It Out campaign against racism amongst football fans. Their slogan is ‘Lets Kick Racism Out of Football’. This campaign has been successful in helping to transform British football from the state it was in when John Barnes was a young player; a campaign against racism amongst Israeli football fans is sorely needed. While those who are in favour of boycotting Israel would prefer antiracists not to campaign against racism in Israel, John Barnes appears to disagree. Barnes visited Israel only a week after the PSC began its effort to win the Kick It Out Campaign to a boycott of Israeli ‘apartheid’.

In July 2006 the European cricket cup took place in Scotland. This is far from being a professional and high profile event. The only European country that plays cricket at the top level is England, which did not take part. This was an amateur event without any great media coverage and without many spectators. The Scottish PSC launched a campaign against the Israeli cricket team’s participation in the tournament:

The Israeli cricket team is playing in Scotland on 3, 5, 6 July 2006 - help us STOP the game, Israel must not be allowed to enjoy their status as a ‘normal’ state, enjoying rest & recreation, while Lebanon burns and Palestine is imprisoned! Contact secretary@scottishpsc.org.uk.¹²⁹

¹²⁹ Quote is from the Scottish PSC website and is no longer online; quoted <http://www.engageonline.org.uk/blog/article.php?id=548>, downloaded 26 February 2006.

This campaign was successful in preventing Israel's matches from going ahead. The organizers announced that matches were cancelled due to 'public safety issues' (news.bbc.co.uk 2006).¹³⁰ After John Barnes, another high profile antiracist 'boycott breaker' was Roger Waters, former member of Pink Floyd and the man who wrote the iconic 70s song 'The Wall'. Waters went to Israel to play a gig and while he was there, he took some time to campaign against the separation barrier being built by the Israelis on Palestinian land.¹³¹ His gig had originally been planned to take place in a park in Tel Aviv but following pressure from the boycott campaign, Waters agreed to move the venue. The gig took place at Neve Shalom / Wahat al Salam, a village called in English 'Oasis of Peace'. This village was founded jointly by Jewish and Palestinian Arab peace campaigners to educate for peace and to live in a mixed community. Waters seems to have done a deal with the boycott campaigners which they were able to spin as a victory. But in truth, Waters played in front of thousands of fans in the heart of pre-1967 Israel, just off the main highway which connects Jerusalem to Tel Aviv. He made his political opposition to Israeli policy clear but he rejected the boycott:

Waters articulated his position as follows:

I have a lot of fans in Israel, many of whom are refuseniks. I would not rule out going to Israel because I disapprove of the foreign policy any more than I would refuse to play in the UK because I disapprove of Tony Blair's foreign policy. (McGreal 2006)

¹³⁰ Osama Saeed, of the Muslim Association of Britain, said of the decision to drop the match: 'This is fabulous news, though we would wish that the decision had been taken earlier by the organisers on the grounds of principle rather than practicality.'

However, Dr Kenneth Collins, from the Glasgow Jewish Representative Council, said: 'We have already had daubings on a synagogue in Glasgow and one in Edinburgh and we are very worried that threats to Israeli interests could spread to Jewish interests in the city.'

'The Jewish community in Glasgow are not spokesmen for Israel. We have a natural sympathy with what happens there and many of us have relatives there and we are very concerned about how Israel is treated and how it's looked upon.' (news.bbc.co.uk 2006)

¹³¹ Waters: 'The poverty inflicted by the wall has been devastating for Palestinians. It has kept children from their schools, the sick from proper medical care and continues to destroy the Palestinian economy. I fully support War on Want's campaign, and hope that as many people as possible sign the wall as a strong message to the UK government that immediate action is essential.' (WarOnWant.org 2006)

I am happy to play to anybody who believes in peace. I don't discriminate between any of my fans, wherever they live. Being an Israeli does not disbar from being a human being. (McIntyre 2006)

'I've seen pictures of [the wall], I've heard a lot about it but without being here you can't imagine how extraordinarily oppressive it is and how sad it is to see these people coming through these little holes,' he added. 'It's craziness.' (YnetNews.com 2006)

He sprayed the words 'No Thought Control' in huge red letters onto the wall.

It seems likely that one strategy we can expect more of from the Palestine Solidarity movement is to harass particular individuals who 'break the boycott' of Israel. We should expect people like Waters to be at the centre of campaigns designed to make others think that it is just not worth the hassle of going to Israel. The threat is of pickets of concerts and the branding of artists as 'Zionists' and 'apologists for apartheid'.

CONCLUSION

i Is criticism of Israel antisemitic?

Sometimes criticism of Israel is antisemitic. For example in the Hamas Covenant, which criticizes Israel for being a manifestation of a Jewish conspiracy alongside the French and Russian revolutions and the First and Second World Wars. In this case, not only is criticism of Israel antisemitic, but so is the criticism of the French and Russian Revolutions. Sometimes criticism of Hilary Clinton is misogynist, and sometimes it is not. Sometimes criticism of Zimbabwe is racist and sometimes it is not.

ii Is criticism of Israel necessarily antisemitic?

No, of course not, but who says that it is? There are very few Jewish communal spokespeople or Israeli politicians who are prepared to make such an evidently false claim. The contention that criticism of Israel is necessarily antisemitic nearly always functions as a straw-man argument. The difficult arguments for some ‘critics of Israel’ to deal with are that criticism of Israel is often expressed using rhetoric or images which resonate with antisemitism; or that criticism often holds Israel to higher standards than other states, and for no good reason; or that it often employs conspiracy theory; or that it uses demonizing analogies; or that it casts Jews as oppressors; or that criticism is made in such a way as to pick a fight with the vast majority of Jews; or that the word *criticism* is really being used to stand for discriminatory practices against Israelis or against Jews. These much more serious and realistic charges are too often brushed off by blithely employing the *Livingstone formulation*: ‘for far too long the accusation of antisemitism has been used against anyone who is critical of the policies of the Israeli government.’ (Livingstone 2006)

The *Livingstone formulation* does two things. First, it denies the distinction between criticism and demonization by subsuming both into the simple category of ‘criticism’. This is dangerous because what we need is clarity about the distinction, not denial. Criticism of Israeli human rights abuses is not only legitimate; it is appropriate and

important. But those who deny the distinction between criticism and demonization render themselves incapable of making serious and legitimate criticism. Apart from the direct damage done by demonization, these ‘critics’ also find that they have put themselves into a position where they are unable to do anything to help the cause of Palestinian independence, freedom or democracy; against their own intentions, they are actually more likely to harm than to help those causes. Precisely where the boundary between criticism and demonization lies is an open question for public discussion and debate.

Secondly, the *Livingstone formulation* does not simply accuse anyone concerned with contemporary antisemitism of being wrong, but it also accuses them of bad faith: ‘the accusation of antisemitism *has been used* against *anyone* who is critical...’ [my *italics*]. Not an honest mistake then, but a secret, common plan to try to de-legitimize criticism with an instrumental *use* of the charge of antisemitism. Crying wolf. Playing the antisemitism card. The *Livingstone formulation*, which as we have seen is becoming a standard response for those who seek, against the clear and mounting evidence, to deny that there is a problem of contemporary antisemitism, is both a straw-man argument and a charge of ‘Zionist’ conspiracy. It is, in itself, an antisemitic claim. Its regular appearance is also, in itself, evidence that antisemitic ways of thinking are unexceptional in contemporary mainstream left and liberal discourse.

The Reverend Steven Sizer (2006), a leading supporter in the Church of England of the campaign for boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) against Israel, added a Christian twist when he articulated the *Livingstone formulation*. He wrote a letter to *The Independent* responding to an argument by the Chief Rabbi that the campaign for BDS was part of an emerging antisemitic culture in the UK. The Synod (parliament) of the Church, declared Sizer, would not be ‘intimidated by those who like Chicken Little cry “antisemitism” whenever Israeli human rights abuses in the occupied territories are mentioned’. Sizer conflates the campaign for BDS with the ‘mentioning’ of human rights abuses. He goes on to ask ‘Why has the Archbishop faced a torrent of criticism over [a vote to divest from Caterpillar]? Simple: the people in the shadows know that Caterpillar is only the first. “Let justice roll”.’ He confirms the suspicion of some opponents who

argue that the campaign against Caterpillar is a wedge being used to open up the possibility of the complete isolation of Israel. And he strengthens the misgivings of others, who suspect that the use of terms like ‘people in the shadows’, with connotations of secret conspiracy, to describe opponents of BDS, is perhaps not coincidental.

iii Is anti-Zionism a form of antisemitism?

David Matas (2005) makes the argument that anti-Zionism is indeed a form of antisemitism:

Zionism is the expression of the right to self-determination of the Jewish people. Anti-Zionism, by definition, denies and rejects this right by denying the right to a state for the Jewish people. Anti-Zionism is a form of racism. It is the specific denial to the Jewish people of a basic right to which all the peoples of the world are entitled.

This is an argument which employs a similar methodology to that which gives the vulgar anti-Zionist result, ‘Zionism=Racism’. Zionism is racism (by this definition) because it necessarily builds a state which defines belonging according to a prior notion of ethnicity; anti-Zionism is racism (by Matas’ definition) because it denies the right of Jewish self-determination while defending self-determination for all other nations. By this methodology we can understand the world by looking carefully at the definitions of words; in contrast this work has employed a methodology of understanding which starts with an investigation of the world as it exists; concepts yes, but also discourse and also their actualizations in social movements. In writing about both the Israel-Palestine conflict and contemporary antisemitism the concept of *society* is often absent. As we have seen, anti-Zionism, even in its most macho historical materialist forms, often affords huge explanatory weight to ideas. It appears reluctant to base its critique in an understanding of how society is actually functioning and changing, an understanding of how actual people are relating to each other and to the social structures which they create and by which they are created. There is too much schematic thinking coming out of

ideational frameworks which are only tenuously anchored to actual social processes, agents and structure. Anti-Zionism is not a form of racism. But it is a profoundly flawed, shallow and light-weight framework and worldview. Antiracist anti-Zionism presents itself as the legitimate child of Jewish socialist opposition to Zionism in the first third of the twentieth century; but some suspect that its real father is Soviet antisemitism. I have presented some of the kinds of evidence that is necessary to pin down the complex relationship between anti-Zionism and antisemitism. A genealogy, a historical analysis, would also help.

iv Would an academic boycott of Israel be antisemitic?

Yes. It is an antisemitic policy because it aims to punish Israeli academics, the majority of whom are Jewish, according to different standards to academics in other states. If a North Korean mathematician wants to come to a conference in Britain, we will be happy to discuss mathematics with her; we will not demand that she repudiates her state's constitutional claim that North Korea is a socialist paradise on earth nor that she admits that she lives under one of the most repressive and inhumane states on earth. This is how it should be. Discuss calculus during the day; discuss politics over dinner; help her to defect, if she wants. But if an Israeli wants to come to the same conference, she won't be allowed; she won't be allowed to attend the conference, to have her journal articles considered for publication or to remain part of the global academic community, unless she first passes some kind of test, such as repudiating her university or ritually 'criticizing' the 'apartheid' policies of her state. The North Korean will be allowed in, the Israeli will not. This is an antisemitic policy.

It is a long time since the principle was universally acknowledged in liberal society that racism does not depend on people acting out of malice or hatred; racism usually propagates itself in a more insidious and unconscious way. In Britain the final official bastion for this conception of racism was the police force, and it was eventually conquered by the High Court Judge, Sir William Macpherson when he reported on the public inquiry into the police handling of the investigation of the murder of Stephen Lawrence. The report said:

6.13 Lord Scarman accepted the existence of what he termed “*unwitting*” or “*unconscious*” racism. To those adjectives can be added a third, namely “*unintentional*”. All three words are familiar in the context of any discussion in this field.

It is instructive to see the sophisticated and experienced antiracists of the boycott campaign turn their palms to the sky in the innocent manner of twentieth century Police Federation representatives and plead that a practice can only be racist if it is motivated by racism. The boycott of Israeli academics is not motivated by antisemitism but it is nevertheless antisemitic in effect. Any kind of impact assessment would demonstrate that it is a policy which would impact on Jews – both Israeli and not – much more heavily than anybody else. And there is no morally, politically or legally relevant reason which could mitigate or excuse this racist impact.

Another sense in which the boycott is antisemitic is because it is a campaign which spreads antisemitic ways of thinking, which sets itself up for a fight with Jews and which creates a toxic atmosphere of accusation and mistrust towards those Jews who oppose the campaign. Non-Jews too, who oppose the boycott campaign are treated as though they were part of a Zionist conspiracy or Israel lobby and are thereby, also, subjected to antisemitic libel. This sense in which it is antisemitic is not necessary to *any imaginable* campaign to boycott Israel; it is simply true of the boycott campaign which exists. It relies on fostering an emotional internalization of Israel as being a unique evil on the planet and it cannot avoid allowing that passion to be directed also at those Jews who do not define themselves as anti-Zionist, and who speak out in opposition to the boycott. It is only necessary to picture a scene where an Israeli professor, who has failed to repudiate her status as a faculty member of Haifa or Tel Aviv University, who has failed to denounce her country for being an apartheid state, is being picketed by British trade unionists in order to prevent her from giving a seminar; it is only necessary to picture this scene to know that this is an antisemitic policy. Even if the picket was fronted by anti-Zionist Jews, it would still be an antisemitic policy. Picture the mundane organizational work which would be necessary to make the picket happen. Picture the ways in which Jewish union members (the ones who are not anti-Zionist, and who had not yet resigned from the union in disgust) would have to be marginalized in the local branch. Picture the Jewish students’ societies holding a counter-picket; picture the anti-Zionist Jewish

students asserting loudly the right of the union to prevent the Israeli professor from speaking by screaming ‘criticism of Israel is not antisemitic’.

And the boycott is antisemitic in another sense; also not a necessary sense, but necessary to the world in which we live. The scene imagined above resonates in Jewish memory because of its similarities to previous anti-Jewish boycotts. Jews were pushed out of Polish universities in 1968 in a purge which used the language of anti-imperialist anti-Zionism. Jews were pushed out of the universities of the Middle East in the 1950s and the 1960s, all except for the ones in Israel. There were measures in place to exclude Jews, including quotas, in many US universities until the second half of the twentieth century. Jews were discriminated against in Soviet universities and were stopped from studying certain subjects. Jews were picketed out of the universities in Germany following the coming to power of the Nazis. Jews were kept out of many of the universities of Europe until they forced their way in during the second half of the 19th century. The boycotters can berate me impatiently and in outraged tones for bringing up all these entirely irrelevant stories, they can accuse me of ‘using’ antisemitism to de-legitimize their ‘criticism’; they can accuse me of invoking a red herring or of throwing dust in the eyes. In my own union branch it was argued that the fact that ‘Zionists’ are so horrified by the boycott, the fact that it ‘hits a nerve’, is evidence of its effectiveness. They can deny the analogies as much as they like; but many Jews will know that it is not right for Israelis to be excluded from universities while everyone else in the world is allowed in; and people who consider themselves antiracist should know it too.

iv Are people who support the boycott campaign antisemitic?

I am not a prosecutor, in the Soviet style, accusing people of the crime of antisemitism. I do not know what goes on inside people’s heads. I am interested in antisemitism as a social phenomenon and as a macro phenomenon. I am interested in what people do and what they say; and particularly in what is done and said in society in general. I am interested in the emergent properties of anti-Zionism. I am interested in the unintended consequences of people’s actions who are simply motivated by a wish to support the Palestinians.

I am interested in the following statistical correlation: Kaplan and Small (2006) found in their analysis of survey data, that ‘anti-Israel sentiment consistently predicts the probability that an individual is anti-Semitic, with the likelihood of measured antisemitism increasing with the extent of anti-Israel sentiment observed.’¹³² So if we select Europeans who believe that Israel is an apartheid state and who believe that the Israeli forces deliberately target Palestinian civilians, and if we put them in a room, then that roomful of people would contain many more antisemites, defined independently, than a room of random Europeans. Anti-Zionists should be aware of the fact that people who believe what they believe about Israel are significantly more likely than average also to be antisemitic. This fact should make them consider carefully the possibility that what they say and do might exacerbate antisemitism. It is interesting, then, that, by use of the *Livingstone formulation*, these antiracists very often refuse to be careful in that way. But Kaplan and Small cannot tell us that there is not a current of antiracist anti-Zionism which is immune from the antisemitism which they detect in the general sample of people who show ‘anti-Israel sentiment’; and they cannot tell us what causal mechanism or what ideational processes or what chains of meaning relate hostility to Israel and racism against Jews.

It is important to distinguish between the ideologically committed anti-Zionist core of the boycott campaign and the periphery of people who are attracted or seduced by its rhetoric. The core knows, thinks it knows, has a responsibility to know, something about Israel and Palestine, past and present. It has a responsibility to think seriously about the possibility of stirring up, licensing or legitimizing antisemitism. Many of the people who are tempted to support the boycott campaign do so for the best of reasons and with the best of intentions. They want to do something to help the desperate situation in Palestine and to do so in solidarity with the Palestinians. The boycott campaign offers them a simple and easy way of demonstrating their uncompromising hostility to the violence and racism of the occupation. And many of the people seduced by the rhetoric of the core campaigns do not know much about the conflict or about the history and tropes of

¹³² Kaplan and Small (2006) ‘...based on a survey of 500 citizens in each of 10 European countries, the authors ask whether those individuals with extreme anti-Israel views are more likely to be anti-Semitic’ and they control ‘for numerous potentially confounding factors....’

antisemitism. This is the group which is likely to make up many of the trade union activists who would be responsible for implementing a boycott on the ground, in the colleges. This fact should give us cause for concern.

v Is the left antisemitic?

No, the left is not antisemitic. Some streams and traditions which think of themselves as being on the left are fighting for their belief that Israel is a unique evil to be adopted as mainstream commonsense. They are having some success in mainstreaming this view and with it often comes certain antisemitic ways of thinking. These ideas are appearing all over mainstream discourse and are no longer marginalized on the extreme left and the extreme right. Most of the speakers who *opposed* the boycott at the 2007 UCU conference identified themselves as being on the left. Most of them were defending what they believed to be an authentic left wing position. They argued for building solidarity with Palestinians and with the Israeli peace movement; for helping to facilitate links between Palestinian academics, Israeli academics and the outside world; for a strategy to oppose the occupation; they warned against antisemitism; they warned of the dangers to UCU and college workers' unity which were posed by the boycott campaign; they warned of the damage which would be done to the cause of Palestinian statehood by support of the boycott. The debate was between left traditions; the right was not really represented at UCU conference at all; not the 'Zionist' right, not the British right; unless one includes the Islamist right, whose influence was certainly felt but which was not significantly represented in person. There have always been pro-totalitarians and antisemites on the left but they have never constituted the left because they have always been opposed by anti-totalitarians and anti-antisemites. This is still the case.

vi Why has the boycott campaign been so successful in Britain in 2007?

This is a question which this research can only begin to answer tentatively. Two peculiarities of the British come immediately to mind. One is that, almost uniquely in Europe, Britain was not occupied by the Nazis and the other is that Britain has a

particular memory of colonialism and empire. According to the ADL (Anti Defamation League) report on attitudes towards Jews (2007) in Europe,

Respondents over the age of 45 are much more likely than other segments of the British population to “strongly oppose” the efforts to boycott Israel.... Of the 15 percent of those surveyed who say that they “strongly oppose” a boycott of Israel, 79 percent are over the age of 45.

One explanation of this differential in terms of age might be connected to memories of the Holocaust. The older half of the population grew up and were politically formed in the shadow of the Holocaust. The younger half, perhaps, regards it as something from history rather than something connected to their own lives. Perhaps they are also influenced by anti-Zionist and antisemitic efforts to play down the extent to which the Holocaust was something connected to antisemitism or Jews in particular, and to play up the ‘use’ of the Holocaust and antisemitism which is allegedly made by ‘Zionists’. If this explanation is right then it indicates that in the post-Holocaust world there were strong taboos against antisemitism. It may be that those taboos are now less strong than they were in the twentieth century and it might also be that contemporary antisemitism tends to by-pass those taboos rather than to challenge them directly. In any case, Britain was less immediately affected by the Holocaust than most of Europe; Jews were not taken from amongst other British people off to Auschwitz;¹³³ and British society has not been forced to face the legacy of its own collaboration with that process, as many European societies have. The British were never offered the opportunity to collaborate.

Josephs (2007) quotes Barry Camfield, deputy general-secretary of the Transport and General Workers half of UNITE as saying in his speech to conference that

Britain had stood alone against Hitler and had liberated Jewish victims of the Holocaust. “So we will not have the Israeli state telling us that the boycott is antisemitic,” he said.

Apart from the senses in which Britain did much less than it might have done to liberate Jews, this could only be a British sentiment. Britain, in Camfield’s imagination is not only not implicated and not guilty, it is actually the hero of the Holocaust, the St George

¹³³ A small number of Jews were deported from the Nazi occupied Channel Islands.

which slew the antisemitic Nazi dragon. Here is yet another way in which the Holocaust is dragooned into service for the boycott campaign.

While the inhibitions created by the memory of the Holocaust may be less strong in Britain than elsewhere, the legacy of British colonialism is not. In the British debate, the sentiment that Britain is somehow responsible for Israeli human rights abuses because of its role in the period before and during 1948, as well as its contemporary role in the alliance with the USA, seems to be important. If there are feelings of national guilt nursed on the British left then they are more likely to be concerned with the British Empire than with the Holocaust. So one tentative explanation for the leading role that Britain is currently playing in the boycott campaign may be that the inhibition on antisemitism is weaker in Britain while the guilt element, driven by an essentialized and historically uninformed anti-imperialism, may be stronger.

But Anti-Zionism and the boycott campaign are also genuinely global movements. While they do manifest themselves differently in different places, the centrality of the internet to the production and circulation of these narratives gives the movement a tendency to by-pass national particularities. The English language press in Israel, instantly available online, Ha'aretz, YnetNews, the Jerusalem Post, provides much of the daily raw material around which political narratives are constructed. Events and political interventions tend to impact quickly around the world. The 2006 CUPE (Canadian Union of Public Employees) boycott decision was made during the same weekend as the Natfhe decision in Britain; Ronnie Kasrils and Desmond Tutu's words are taken up everywhere from South Africa; Americans Mearsheimer and Walt had a huge and immediate impact on the rhetoric of British anti-Zionism; Matthias Küntzel and the anti-Deutsch left in Germany make their interesting interventions. More comparative studies and more historical studies are necessary to shed more light on the question, 'Why Britain?' This study offers more of a snap-shot of contemporary British events than a historical analysis; it offers some enduring analysis of necessarily ephemeral case studies. It looks at how antisemitism manifests itself in mainstream discourse, but not how much or how differently in Britain to other places.

As well as being an analysis of contemporary anti-Zionism and its relationship to contemporary antisemitism, this paper is also meant as a case study in cosmopolitan politics. It brings together a conceptual discussion of anti-Zionism with an empirical analysis of public discourse in the UK, mainly between 2004 and 2007, with the boycott campaign, which I have argued constitutes a material actualization of those conceptual and discursive realities. Most anti-Zionists, as well as the boycott campaign, think of themselves as being internationalist, and etymologically, they are indeed more internationalist than they are cosmopolitan. They largely accept the methodologically nationalist narrative of the world as being divided into distinct nations. They largely see international politics as being about the relationships between these national state actors. Mearsheimer and Walt (2006a; 2006b), whose work fits into the *realist* tradition of international relations, operate with a surprisingly unproblematised notion of ‘national interest’. Anti-Zionism in general succeeds less in furthering the cosmopolitan project of disrupting the conceptual tradition of methodological nationalism than it does in rejuvenating the realist tradition of international relations. Anti-Zionist thought and practice, as well as Zionist thought and practice, tend to rest on the principles of collective (national) responsibility and collective (national) punishment, rather than the difficult political work of disrupting nationalist realities.

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